Kapila Vatsyayan

Traditional Indian Theatre

Multiple Streams

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India—The Land and the People

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KAPILA VATSYAYAN



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To the Memory of
Dr. V. Raghavan
the pioneer of
modern critical scholarship
of the theatre arts

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first book entitled *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* traced the history of the Indian performing arts in their framework of interrelationship until the 11th century. A second volume entitled *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* followed. It sought to present a contemporary spatial picture of the living traditions at the tribal and rural levels. The large grey area comprehending nearly a thousand years of Indian history between the 10th and the 19th centuries and covering all parts of India remained untouched. For any meaningful framework it was necessary to bridge this gap. The task was challenging both on account of the evolution of regional languages and literatures, as also for the staggering multiplicity of genres and styles of the visual and peforming arts. The unity provided by the Sanskrit language and a pan-Indian tradition appears to give place to an amazing plurality of traditions often mistaken for fragmentation and heterogeneity. Nevertheless a perusal of both medieval literature and examination of the living survivals of the several forms made it obligatory to explore this phenomenon; specially because the period has often been dismissed as the proverbial Dark Ages of the Indian performing and visual arts. Such a task could appropriately be accomplished adequately only as a teamwork project.

Despite the obvious limitations of a single individual attempting it, I felt that it was necessary to provide at least rough framework in spatial and temporal terms so that the contours of growth and the underlying unity of these seemingly diverse forms could be identified. The book would not of course have been written but for the persuasive request of some friends. As I began to explore the area I was convinced that 'theatre' in its totality rather than just 'dance' or 'music' which has been my chief concern was the true indicator of the period under discussion. Here the spoken and sung word and the 'movement' could not be dissociated from each other. It would be almost impossible to see these elements in isolation. Theatre was a total experience and multimedia expression comprehending the four types of *abhinaya* and the two levels of presentation, namely the *Nātya* and *Loka*. Also the prolific literary activity of medieval India convinced me that the origins of the so called folk rural forms lay as much in regional literatures as in the oral traditions. This deduction was further confirmed through an in depth study of the oral traditions. It was further confirmed through an in depth experience of the contemporary survivals of the theatre forms so far loosely termed as 'traditional' or 'folk drama'. Both

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This Preface was written for the original edition published in 1980.

literary evidence and personal discussions revealed that the literate and the oral traditions should be seen in a framework of relationship rather than of dissociation. What appeared on the surface as belonging only to the rural masses without history and ancient links indeed embodied elements which were the continuation of tradition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Questioning of some accepted hypothesis of the Indian artistic traditions became obligatory. First, whether the *Nāṭyaśāstra* system itself did not incorporate regional and local styles and second, whether or not the plural traditions were in fact multiple flowerings of the same tree. The result is the present volume. Its main aim is to trace the roots of these forms and the gradual development of these genres.

The contemporary manifestation has been placed against the backdrop of the literary and artistic history of the region.

Naturally, such a presentation can only be a starting point of further intensive individual studies of each form at the micro-level. The aim of the present study is to provide the basis of such a fuller reconstruction of each form and genre.

Understandably even a first attempt demands traversing of several regional literatures, plural miniature painting traditions and the other allied arts. Few can hope to master all Indian languages in a lifetime or have access to original sources. Despite my fortuitous circumstance of being able to follow half a dozen or more Indian languages, the limitation is fully recognized. Necessarily translations and secondary sources had to be relied upon, with the full recognition of the obvious limitations.

Besides, chronology of regional languages and literatures continues to be a matter of controversy. Dates remain an area of heated debate and dispute. In the case of some literatures, even dates of major landmarks, such as Kamban, remain unresolved. In such a situation where the primary purpose is not to establish chronologies and speculate on authentic dating but to follow the general contours of literary development, one could do no better than to rely on the chronologies suggested by critics and authors of the languages. The Sahitya Akademi series of Histories of Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali and Oriya have been helpful in this regard. I acknowledge sincere debt to the authors of these histories, as also to Sri K.M. Munshi and Sri M.R. Mazumdar in respect of Gujarati. For the historical account of Bhāonā and related forms I am indebted to Dr. Maheshwar Neog and Sri H. Barua. Dr. Maheshwar Neog also provided the opportunity for many stimulating discussions on the arts of Assam. For the detailed accounts of *Khyāla,* etc. Dr. Mahendra Bhanwat's work has provided rich material.

But theatre is an occurrent experiential art unrestricted to the written word. The experience and the discussion are indispensable. In this, I am grateful to scholars and savants in different regions of India. Foremost amongst these is the late Dr. V. Raghavan. It was at his insistance and persuasion that I took the first journey to Melattur as far back as 1949. He first introduced me also. to Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā. To him I owe a debt which cannot be articulated in words. Also I remember Sri E. Krishna Iyer's cooperation. Discussions with Prof. K. S. Karanth, Dr. Martha Ashton and Bhagavatar Gopal on Yakṣagāna have been most enlightening and rewarding. The several masters of Kuṭiyaṭṭam including Mani Madhava Cakayar and Ram Cakayar answered many queries.

Kunnjuni Rajas' monograph and Clifford Jones and Betty Jones' work on Kuṭiyaṭṭam have provided fresh insights. The most rewarding experience has been the stay in Kerala where I could satiate myself with these performances night after night.

Although literary material on the Chau forms is scanty, I have been fortunate in discussing many aspects of the forms with both the scholars and artists of the three forms. I should particularly like to thank Sri Kṛṣna Cand Naik and others for Mayurbhanj Chau, Guru Kedarnath Sahu and Raja Brijendra Singh Deo for Seraikalā and Sri Asutosh Bhattacharya, Smt. Purnima Sinha and Guru Gambhir Singh for Puruliā.

Repeated trips to Mathura and Vrundavan and discussions with Swami Ladli Prasad, Ramsvarup and Hargovinda enriched my understanding of the Līlā forms. I am indebted to them. The work of Sri Ramanarayana Agrawala and Sri Yamadagni has been helpful in rechecking defects of contemporary performance. Prof. Dashrath Ojha's work in *Rāsa* along with that of the late Sri J.C. Mathur's, specially their joint publication *Prācīna Bhāṣa Nāṭaka,* have provided valuable material for reconstructing the history of some of the forms. Prof. Dashrath Ojha has generously provided information and material. Indeed some of it I have not been able to incorporate in the study.

Besides the woks of Sri K.M. Munshi and Sri Mazumdar, stimulating discussions with Smt. Sudha Desai and Sri Rasikalal Parikh clarified many doubts in respect of Bhavāi. Sri Mansukh Joshi and others from Gujarat have generously responded to queries. It was however after the manuscript was sent to the press, that I had the real exhilarating experience of Bhavāi at a festival held in Morvi, recently. After discussion with the Bhavāyās, particularly Sri Manibhai and Sri Babubhai, and specially after I had a chance to witness their electrifying performance, I would gladly modify some of my observations on Bhavāi which were based on earlier experiences. This latest experience obliges one to add that what I considered a languishing albeit crude survival of a five hundred year old theatrical form is in fact a vibrant tradition with a fantastic range and polyvalence of content, language, stage techniques and musical modes. To these masters I acknowledge my sincerest debts. This was a deep experience of learning.

Although Yātrā today has achieved a new high in commercial theatre, there have been occasions for witnessing authentic and genuine performances. Discussions with Prof. Asutosh Bhattacharya and Smt. Sova Sen have also been helpful.

Dr. Mahendra Bhanwat's work on Khyāla and Sri Devilal Samar's deep and extensive knowledge of the Rajasthan arts have always been useful. They have both provided occasions for witnessing performances and subsequent discussions. To them I am grateful.

Although much has been written on the Tamāśā in Marathi, the roots of which have been traced only to the oral traditions. Further probing into Marathi literature has led me to speculate on the literary sources of this popular form of theatre.

Despite my best intentions, it was not possible to include here many other forms, particularly Kariyāla from Himachal Pradesh and Bhāñḍ Pather from Kashmir. Sri S.S. Thakur's monograph on the former scheduled to be published by the Sangeet Natak Akademi will undoubtedly fill this gap.

I am indebted also to the writers of all previous studies on the subject or particular

forms especially Dr. V. Raghavan, Sri Suresh Awasthi and Smt. Induja Awasthi, Mr. Clifford Jones, Sri Kunnjuni Raja, Dr. K.S. Karanth, Sri Balwant Gargi, late Sri J.C. Mathur and Dr. Shyam Parmar. The late Dr. V. Raghavan, Dr. Shyam Parmar and Sri J.C. Mathur were poineers in the field and their absence will be long felt. It is a pity that we shall no longer be receivers of future contributions by these discerning scholars.

It was not altogether easy to collect or select photographs for the publication. In this sphere many institutions and individuals have been most cooperative. Mr. Clifford Jones readily provided excellent documentation for Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Sri Balwant Gargi on Yakṣagāna and other forms through Nibha Joshi of the National School of Drama. The Sangeet Natak Akademi's collections of photographs have been a helpful source. Thanks are also due to Haridas Bhatt of the Yakṣagāna Kendra Udipi, the Bharatiya Loka Kala Mandal, Anamika in Calcutta, Smt. Sova Sen, the Rangsri Little Ballet Troupe, the Indian National Theatre, the Government of Assam Publication Division, Prof. Asutosh Bhattacharya and many others.

To Sri Balu Rao of the Sahitya Akademi, I owe thanks for perusing the chapters on Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā and for offering many helpful suggestions.

Dr. Lokenath Bhattacharya spared valuable time to edit a manuscript which presented many problems of transliterations, uniformity in English renderings, the maintenance of an easily readable style for an Indian lay reader. In all these matters he was extraordinarily helpful. Smt. Varsha Das has competently seen the book through the press. To them and others of the National Book Trust I am grateful. Sri S. Sharma typed the difficult manuscript and thanks are due to him.

And finally to Dr. S. Gopal, former Chairman of the National Book Trust, at whose active initiative the manuscript was begun.

Even at the cost of repetition it is necessary to say that this must be considered as a rough framework for further intensive and in depth studies of the several genres and multiple streams. The attempt here has been to see these multiple traditions in their essential framework of mutual relationships of some unifying principles, themes, content and many distinctive formal elements. It has also been my endeavour to raise some conceptual issues on the nature of interaction which takes place between different levels of manifestation, and to link the textual sources, both creative and critical, with the living contemporary traditions. If this can stimulate thought and arouse some interest in seeing the multifaceted vibrant traditions of Indian theatre both for their intrinsic value and as important indicators of the Indian cultural traditions, my task is accomplished. Further reading has been suggested for those who wish to probe deeper: the present work is by purpose written for the lay adult Indian reader in keeping with the objectives of the National Book Trust. Between the writing of the book and the publication there is a gap of four years; valuable material on the subject has appeared in the intervening period, which has been incorporated in the bibliography.

And lastly I acknowledge my grateful thanks to the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Foundation which gave me the opportunity to complete the manuscript. Much of the material was gathered over many years, but a part of it was also related to my study on

the *Gita-Govinda and the Indian Artistic Traditions.* In one sense this is an extension or a by-product of that study. The space and time framework of the two studies coincided, and the queries of one helped to support and reconfirm deductions on the other. Other data gathered in the course of the study of the *Gita-Govinda* will be incorporated in a subsequent volume which will be devoted specifically to the *Gita-Govinda* and the performing arts traditions of India between the 13th and 19th centuries.

Kapila Vatsyayan

I

INTRODUCTION

A mention of the performing arts of India immediately brings to one's mind the single-bodied and many-armed image of Durgā, osr of Śiva in his form as Naṭarāja, ever destroying, ever creating new forms of the dance Tāṇḍava. These symbols in plastic form suggest at one level the unified equilibrium, the still-centre, and at the other, the continual play of 'energy' and rhythm in plural forms. The two aspects are interconnected and mutually dependent. The varied art forms like the multiple arms and hands, though distinct and different, are all limbs of the same body. The seeming heterogenity and multiplicity of the several forms may be compared to the different modes of the Tāṇḍava.

Understandably, it is impossible to speak of one monolithic tradition of the arts, particularly of the performing arts in India, which depends and at the same time do not depend on verbal communication only.

There are traditions, and not one tradition, of the performing arts in the vast geographical area. All are characterised by a staggering multiplicity of genres, forms, styles and techniques. Even the contemporary scene belies all classification in terms of clearly defined categories of Western performing arts into classical and folk, sophisticated self-conscious individual artistic creation and collective participative activity, into spoken drama based on the word, musical note or gestures or movement. Nor can they be classified into neat categories of the opera, operetta, the symphony or the chamber orchestra. Further, the insulation of different categories from one another, so characteristic of Western forms until the twentieth century, has been absent here from time immemorial.

Nevertheless, in spite of these complexities and an apparently eternal timelessness, a close look reveals that each of these traditions as prevalent in different regions of the sub-continent and at different levels of society, can be clearly identified both in terms of the evolution of artistic form and style in time and its socio-cultural milieu in space. Layers of different moments of time can be identified in a seemingly contemporary form. Establishing, thus, a chronology of the cultural pattern, within which traditions of the performing arts flourished, becomes a highly abstract approach, an abstraction which on one hand guides the spirit of these forms, providing the fundamental unity or continuity and a sense of timelessness, and on the other is marked by an equal preoccupation with

multiple, concrete and varied forms and 'time present' which accounts for change and a continual flux.

Although it would be hazardous and difficult to provide an explanation for this apparent paradox of simultaneous static equilibrium and change and dynamism, it may be worthwhile to try to identify the underlying principles of 'commonality' or universality of cultural traditions of Asia, particularly of the performing arts of Asia, with special reference to India. In order to arrive at some conceptual hypothesis it would be necessary to mention briefly the spatial and temporal situation of these arts.

The spatial situation can be seen both in terms of levels of society and the nature of performance. It can also be seen in terms of the geographical distribution of the different racial/ethnic and linguistic groups.

In purely anthropological terms the levels naturally are tribal, village and urban; in artistic terminology they are sometimes called 'folk' and 'classical', the first implies community participation and the second refers spontaneously to systemized methods of expression— which imply community. Although never explicitly stated, 'folk' is correlated to tribal/village and 'classical' to the urban sophisticated, whether industrialised or not. These implied correlatives have been the cause of much misunderstanding regarding the Asian or the Indian arts. We shall presently examine the nature of such misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, let us begin with a brief account of the different layers of social structure which can be clearly identified in practically all regions of India.

A pervasive tribal belt passes through all parts of India: the dances of these tribal groups can be classified on the basis of anthropological, ethnical factors. Nearly thirty-eight million people of India belong to this category: their dance and music are examples of vigorous folk and classical styles.

There is the Himalayan belt extending from Kashmir to Himachal Pradesh and continuing further to the eastern hills of Bhutan, Sikkim, Manipur, Assam, and Mizoram. Those inhabiting this vast region include distinct tribal communities ranging from the Gujjars to the Bakarwals, and finally ending with the many tribal groups known generally as the Nagas. Chief among these are the Zeliangs, the Maos, the Tang Khuls, the Daflas, the Semas and the Aos.

Another tribal belt can be discerned at the foothills of the Himalayas and merging into the great plains encompassed by the rivers Yamuna and Ganga. Among the tribals of the foothills and great plateaus are several which can be grouped together on account of their social structuring of their life-styles. Again, subgroupings are possible. The tribes of the deserts and plateaus of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra form one macro group, while the Oraons, the Hos, the Marias and the Santhals and some tribes of Orissa constitute another. There are then the tribes which inhabit the plateaus and sea-shores south of the Vindhyas. Among these tribes are some of the most ancient ones, such as the Todas, the Banjaras, the Venadis, etc.

An analysis of the music and dance of these nearly thirty-eight million people shows that these tribes make little or no distinction between verbal and nonverbal communication systems and techniques. Expression is total. Individually, this expression may be free, but

in groups it is mostly a conditioned movement or sound directly related to life function and experience, such as the hunt, etc. Also the song or the dance is a participative activity, but not spontaneous in the sense of allowing free movement. Like the tribal society, the artistic too are highly structured.

Next comes the stage of food-gathering, with a variety of magical fertility rites. Here the immediacy of life experiences is recalled in sound, rhythm and movement. Dramatic action makes its appearance for the first time; naturally, the spoken word and gestures assume a definite position. The fertility rites connected with the earth, the sun, and the moon play an important part here. The artistic form is conditioned not so much by the structuring of the tribal society as in the Daflas, the Aos, the Marias, the Hos and the Oraons, but rather by the functions of the rite: all the pole dances of India belong to this category. The beginnings of procession, music and dance can be traced back to the rites of the 'Jhum' cultivators.

There is then the organized village society whose origin can be linked with the Vedic concept of *grāma*. Nearly 75% of the population of this country and perhaps of some other parts of Asia have lived and continue to live within this social structure. These villages have been analysed from many points of view, both historical and sociological. Here music, dance and drama have been woven into agricultural functions and are integral to the daily and annual routines of the peasant. Many survivals and continuities of tribal society can be discerned in the agricultural rites connected with sowing, reaping, and harvesting. The origin of these, along with many dances of propitiation of magic and sorcery, goes back to an unknown antiquity. Thus, often a contemporary community dance contains in it elements of the original tribal life function. The Garbā and the Bhāṅgrā are typical instances.

Co-existent with the manifestations which are integral to the agricultural cycle of the life of the peasant are artistic manifestations based on the two epics and the many *Jātakas* and *Purāṇas* of Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu origin. In many parts of Asia these epics and *Jātakas,* often local and indigenous myths based on them and similar legends of the oral traditions, continue to play a vital role. The many pageants and tableaux and local forms of dances and dance-dramas developed from both the pure recitative word and its consequential interpretation through gestures, mime and song. The local variations of the epics have been considered as the permeation of the 'great' tradition to the 'little'. However, it is often forgotten that these local and regional forms in turn shaped many literary versions of the epics. A history of the development of the Rama theme will make this amply clear.

Close to the village community but a class apart is a group of professional singers, dancers, musicians and actors, who are differently classified all over India as Bhāḍas, Naṭs, Gandharvas, Vairāgīs, Bīnkāras etc. This is a group for whom the performance is a vocation, not a social, tribal or agricultural function. They are in and yet out of society, a community or group recognized since the days of Pāṇini. They move from place to place. It is this group of people which has been responsible for the mobility of ideas, forms and styles between the villages and urban centres. They have also been the

vehicles of expressions of protest, dissent and reform, the carriers of reform movements and the articulators of satire and social comment and thus the instruments of socio-cultural change. The contemporary forms such as Bhavāi, Nautanki, Terukoothu, Veethināṭakam, Ottānthullāl, etc., belong to this group. In artistic form, their technique ranges from acrobatic to pure spoken drama. The word-gesture relationship is, however, minimal. Of late, these forms have been termed folk-drama, traditional theatre, even street theatre and folk dance. The essence of these forms ranging from ballad recitation and melodic singing for puppetry, acrobatics, dance and theatre, derives from the social sanction and liberty given to make social comment. It is this which links them together. Our concern in the present study is in the main with this category of performing arts of India.

There is finally the urban, city-based culture, not necessarily modern, which has grown up from the tribal/village culture and has, in turn, affected it. Forms which developed within the framework of agricultural and other life functions and particular social organizations are carried forward and taken over in an urban milieu, though only after they have been dissociated from their original agricultural functions. There is no longer an integral relationship with the rigorous social structuring. Into the old form is now introduced a new literary content and a musical score. Classicity is the result. A mannerism and stylization are achieved through chiselling of the earlier forms and structuring them in relation to word and sound. This then has been the secret of the highly esoteric arts which have not lost their links with the earth and have in them the potential of continued rejuvenation through successive ages.

At this level the same̤, the *Purāṇas* and the themes receive a different treatment. The performers are professional or non-professional in terms of economic vocation but they are all dedicated academicians committed to the arts as a discipline of life and as a means of release.

This multi-layered pattern can be observed in practically every region of India; it can also be discerned in many parts of Asia, particularly, Java, Bali, some parts of Thailand, and Burma.

Can one postulate and sum up from this descriptive survey? It is perhaps hazardous but worthwhile. Roughly it may be stated thus. The arts developed in a framework of a local or regional distinctiveness which cuts across socio-economic stratification. There is a dialogue and interaction between varying levels and often there is much overlapping. The movement is a two-way traffic and not merely the penetration of 'great art' into popular levels. Tribal and village forms also affected and continue to affect 'high art'. Also, there is a clearly identifiable pattern of communication among regions at particular levels. Thus, there are two broad patterns: one, a vertical movement among forms of a particular region at different levels and socio-economic groupings, and another, a horizontal movement among regions where themes, content and forms have developed in a framework of continual communication at particular levels.

It could nevertheless be possible to identify contemporary artistic manifestation as tribal, village, semi-urban and urban, and delineate the paths of communication and

interaction among them in different regions and within a region, between tribal village and sophisticated forms. Merely as illustration, one may draw attention to forms in Orissa, Manipur, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh which provide excellent examples of this cultural phenomenon. There is, for example, a connection between the forms of the tribals of Ganjam district, the Pāikas, the dancers of Mayurbhanj, the Jātrā players and the Goṭipuas of the Ākharās and the Mahāris of the temples in Orissa. Channels of communication between the Kali, the Pulyāra Kali, Velakali dances and those of the Devī cult, the Theyaṭṭam, Theriyaṭṭam and finally Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali can also be discerned. Alongside are the elements of commonality and universality among sophisticated forms of dance, such as Odissi, Bharatnāṭyam, Kathak and Maṇipurī belonging to different regions of India.

This spatial situation has to be supplemented with a historical temporal perspective where we see that the traditions of the performing and plastic arts developed within a framework of interconnection and interdependence as a self-conscious awareness and principle and not as mere chance. While the Mohenjadaro civilization was urban, the Ṛgvedic society was pastoral and nomadic with many in-built systems of social cohesiveness and mobility. The *Sāman* was the meeting place of all. By the time of the *Yajurveda,* the magic ritual gestures and the symbolic use of the body had assumed importance. The *Atharvaveda* lays the foundation of a highly developed symbolism and a system of correlation between sense-perception and its expression and meaning: this permeates through all levels of Indian art normally termed as magical, ritualistic and esoteric. In the *Sāmaveda,* the concept of the *mārgī* and *deśī* tells us of the acceptance of levels. After the Vedic, both the upanisadic speculative thought and the Brahmanical ritual traditions gave rise to two parallel streams viz: a unified abstraction of spirit and a simultaneous symbolic concretization in form.

In aesthetics, this framework of the arts was recognized and articulated by the mythical Indian theoretician, Bharata, as early as 2nd century B.C.— 2nd century A.D. He conceived of the theatrical spectacle as a total amalgam of all media and genres ranging from the spoken word to vocal and instrumental music, gestures, mime, décor, costumes, and finally, the inner states of being. He recognized the two levels of performance in the concept of naturalistic (*loka,* real) and stylized conventions (*nāṭya*) of the stage. He saw style as a mode of presentation ranging from the grand to the verbal, from the lyrical to the introspective. He also recognized the emergence of the regional variants in the concept of the *paravṛttis*.

It is thus understandable that the codifier of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* should begin his treatise by stating that he has created a fifth Veda by taking words from the *Ṛgveda,* music from the *Sāmaveda,* gestures from the *Yajurveda* and introspective states from the *Atharvaveda.* In asserting that this will be a discipline, an art unrestricted for all classes and groups of society, he points at the capacity of the arts to cut across all hierarchical stratification. There is evidence in these early texts of artistic activity at different levels and milieus, ranging from the purely recreational to the functional and finally to the highly professional. The writers of the lexicons and manuals such as Pāṇini, Bhartṛhari, Vātsyāyana, etc.,

clearly distinguish these levels and people through the use of many different words for different categories of performers and performance.

This and other formulations on the arts, dating from the 2nd to the 19th centuries, continue to subscribe to a world-view which accepts the phenomenon of the unity of a well-defined goal, a multiplicity of content operating in a framework of inter-dependence of forms and styles among levels and regions. For the theoretician and the practising artist both the unity and the multiplicity and fluidity principles were an unquestioned fundamental conceptual hypothesis, as also an empirical reality.

In course of time, while sophisticated forms emerged as highly stylized individual systems, alongside grew a variety of forms and styles, local and regional in character. These came to be termed as the *désī* forms. So prevalent, pervasive and powerful was the impact of these genres that the theoreticians and codifiers of the 10th-13th centuries included in their treatises a whole new category of artistic forms known as *désī*. The *désī rāgas*, the *désī karaṇas,* the *désī* forms of literature and painting, all found a full and candid discussion in the texts of the period. A perusal of these texts convinces us beyond doubt of the strength and validity of the principles of the traditions enunciated initially in the context of religion and conduct. These are the concepts of the *śāstrācāra* and *lokācāra*. The theorizer and codifier of the arts not only took note of the popular developments but also gave them theoretical and academic sanction. For this, he had precedents and models in the sphere of religion, philosophy and codes of conduct.

One may conclude that these traditions had an in-built mechanism of acceptance of 'change', of variety, of modification within a well-defined system of unity, and the 'eternal'. 'Timelessness' and unity, the everchanging dynamic innovative growth and development were complementary and not in tension and counter-opposition. Tradition and contemporaneity, static equilibrium and dynamic change, acquire a totally different meaning in this context. The one god assuming different forms or the one goddess with multiple arms was the natural symbolic manifestation of such a world-view.

The artistic forms in India are true indicators of this vision and must be studied not against a background of continual annihilation of earlier forms and their replacement by newer ones in a linear order; instead, they must be seen in a relationship of coexistence. A natural corollary was a deliberate attempt to break the insularity amongst the different art forms dependent in the main on the word, sound, gestures, mime, mass, volume, line and colour. By the 6th century A.D. this was such an accepted axiom that the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* embodies the principle through the story of a dialogue between a sage and a king. The king is taken through the successive disciplines of rhythm, music (vocal and instrumental) and movement before he is considered fit to create images for worship. An analysis of any one art or any particular genre is thus only a study of a pair of arms or one particular aspect of the god and not the totality. Despite this integral approach, there is the recognition of the autonomy of particular media and each is dealt with separately.

While, therefore, it would be a partial exercise to analyse genres only in terms of

their dependence on the word or sound or movement in isolation, it would be possible to cull out these elements against the background of interdependence and inter-connection of forms within a region and amongst regions, all operating within the principle of unity and multiplicity.

It would also be possible to discuss the salient features of each form in both time and space, which depend primarily only on the body as a vehicle of communication as distinct from those which depend on the word. The word *vāk* was nevertheless primary at all levels and the oral tradition provided the basis of communication even when the 'word' is communicated not as visual, but an aural experience.

How do we identify these forms in different regions and at different levels in India and what are the chief characteristics? At the tribal level, style is evolved through emphasis on particular parts of the body, particular limbs, as macro movement. This is unrelated to the word, but certainly related to the life function. The artistic form is governed by single units of rhythm used repetitively. Thus, while some tribal dances use the leg as a single unit, others use it a broken up into the movements of the thigh and calf. While solo dancing may have an element of spontaneity, the group dances are conditioned and delimited; it is this self-conscious delimitation which accounts for style and mannerism. We can distinguish Nagas from the Marias and the Hos on account of these varied delimiting mannerisms and repetition of movements where only some parts of the body and not all are articulated. At the village level micro movements of the hand and foot contacts begin to play a part. In the fertility rite dances, trance and magic perform an important role. In some, many more parts of the body with micro movements begin to play a part. The human body is also used symbolically and in doing so, the aim is to arrive at an abstract design in space. Music, more often than not an indispensable ingredient, is not restricted to singing by the dancers. A separate group of reciters and vocalists accompany the dancers. The relationship between the word and the movement is loose, not tightly structured. The thematic aspects of these dances and songs range from fertility to agricultural functions to the presentation of stories from the epics. When we move on to the community theatre (professional or semi-professional) of the village street or court we find that the relationship of the word and gesture has undergone a transformation. Now the relationship is much more rigorous: the theatrical spectacle depends on the spoken or sung word alone, as also in its multiple interpretation through movement. The Rāmalīlā and the Rāsalīlā performances all over India are an example of this phenomenon. So also are dance-drama forms like Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna and Bhāmakalāpam. A different order of relationship of word/sound movement and gesture emerges in the 'street' and pageant forms such as Tamāśā, Bhavāi, Nautanki, Terukoothu, Veethināṭakam, etc. The opposite pole in the street theatre is the acrobatic dance which has no meaning or word content and depends for communication on pure body-skill. The word-gesture relationship changes in the sophisticated solo forms. Here the literary word is set to melodic line, in a given metrical cycle, and is then interpreted either descriptively or symbolically by the dancer. The styles commonly termed as 'classical' in the context of dance, all use this principle; however, each can be distinguished from the other on

account of the use of the human body in distinctive motifs of abstract design. Distinct geometrical patterns guide their articulation techniques.

Thus, the sophisticated or stylized forms which continue to be deeply rooted in village and folk culture evolve a methodology of communication which is strictly regional at one level and universal on account of its abstraction at another. Examples of the pattern of evolution can be cited from all parts of India, but particularly from regions like Orissa, Manipur and Kerala, where different layering and levelling of society are still existent and clearly identifiable.

One common principle which determines the nature of movement at both the village and urban levels is the use of the human form as an impersonal instrument of communication. Expression lies not in spontaneous free movement, but in achieving impersonality through the very personal medium of the body. Indeed, it is this one major factor which gives the Asian dance and dance-drama forms a quality which distinguishes them from the similar forms of many other cultures.

How and when the Indian considered the body as an essential prerequisite for transcending the body constitutes a total history of Indian thought. Neither is this the occasion nor space would permit us to go into the complexities of these thought processes which manifest themselves in the Indian artistic traditions, particularly those which are related to the use and representation of the human form for communication either in the plastic or kinetic medium. The theoretical enunciation of these thought process was made by the early Indian aestheticians in the formulation of the *Rasa* theory which has guided the destiny of Indian art forms for nearly eighteen centuries. Scholars have dwelt at great length on different aspects of the aesthetic experience, the aesthetic content and the methods of communication content in this theory. We shall not go into these aspects here. However, let us draw attention to two principles in aesthetics. One was the purposive use of sensuous form to suggest states of 'being' and the other relating to certain laws of technique which allowed improvisation, innovation and change. The second has been termed *vyabhichārī bhāva* or what is commonly called *sañchārī bhāva* in music and dance. Through the *vyabhichārī bhāva* or *sañchārī bhāva* the artiste could interpret the permanent or dominant states, or major motifs (*sthāyī bhāva*) in as many ways as he liked and present a picture of the world from his distinctive view-point without departing from the overall structure of the given aesthetic theory.

The use of the human body as a vehicle of expression and communication was not restricted to what is termed, normally, as 'dance' or movement: it was brought to the aid of the 'word', *vāk*, whose primacy was unquestioned at all levels, particularly the village and the urban levels. On the word was superimposed the melodic note: the two together provided the essential prerequisites for interpretation through movement. The colour symbolism of the physical environment, costumes, make-up, head-gear all reinforced the other levels. The variety of genres which developed depended in varying degrees on the different blends of these disparate media and were not a result of the exclusive use of a single medium alone.

Thus, in the Indian context, when one speaks of drama, dance or music, one is

alluding only to the dominant or fundamental principle of the 'word' movment or sound and is not referring to these arts in isolation or in mutual exclusiveness.

A recognition of the framework of the interconnection of levels, the interrelatedness of regions, the inter-dependence of art forms, and the principles of eternity (of timelessness) and of flux (everchanging, ever-renewing manifestation) demanding a concentrated still centre and peripheral multiple expressions, is essential for a true understanding of the traditions of the performing arts of India.

The principles of eternity and of flux, of an ever-old and ever-new or renewing phenomenon, were integrated into Indian thought at its metaphysical as well as mundane levels. This then is the pattern of Indian performing arts. They can be vehicle of any contemporary concern, but the contemporaneity must be contained within the continual symbol of the eternal or at least the old. Multiple meaning or forms thus become the logical corollary. 'Theatre' is one amongst several other disciplines where the principle of the 'unmanifest' and 'varied manifestations' was embodied.

This general survey of the spatial and temporal contours of the Indian performing arts was necessary in order to clearly demarcate the area of our present study which attempts to deal with forms that cannot be identified purely as tribal on the one hand and urban on the other. In short, they do not come under the category of what are popularly described as 'folk' or 'classical' and yet there are many areas of overlap.

The geo-physical environment, the life-style in terms of modes of food-gathering and cultivation, the socio-economic structuring, the religio-political developments and the evolution of literary and plastic art traditions have all shaped and influenced these forms, as they have the other two categories of performance which do not concern us here. In turn, they have interacted with and influenced the growth of literary genres, plastic arts and performance at the rural and urban levels. The variety and multiplicity of content, form and technique of this category of expression performed either by the community (non-professional or vocational) or by professionals have led scholars to label the different forms in innumerable ways. Some have called them folk-theatre, dance or drama, others have used the term, 'traditional dance-drama' and yet others have called them popular rural theatre. Sub-categories have been made of folk-ballad, opera, dance-drama, arena theatre, changing-locale theatre, cycle-plays, etc. The list and the methodology of categorisation could be enlarged. Nevertheless, suffice it to say at this stage that behind these attempts at classification in recent years is the vague recognition that there is a certain commonality of approach which distinguishes these forms from purely tribal or village participative activity on the one hand and on the other, from the higly stylized individual expression of dance-forms commonly called 'classical' and normally associated with the urban.

Let us first begin by listing the forms in terms of their dominant medium of artistic expression and then attempt to relate it to the class or community of performers who are the chief repositories of some of these forms.

We have first and foremost the 'ballad' form which depends in the main on a literary composition, not necessarily belonging to the written or literate traditions of the country.

The performer normally is a solo artiste; or there are two individuals; or it is one narrator accompanied by a small chorus. These forms, from all over India, are known as the Pabuji ki paḍa of Rajasthan, Āllah-Udal of Madhya Pradesh, the Harikathā of Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Dasakāthia of Orissa, the Rāma and Kṛṣṇakathā of U.P., Punjab, the Burrā Kathā of Andhra Pradesh, Harikathā of Tamilnadu and so on.

There are then the cycle plays or what has been termed as Miracle plays revolving round the theme of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa or Durgā which are performed by a group as a spectacle and not by a soloist as in the case of ballad singing. Into this category fall the Rāmalīlā prevalent all over India, such as the Rāmalīlā of Banaras, Ayodhya and other parts of India, the Kṛṣṇalīlā and Rāsalīlā of Mathura and Vrindavan, and the many changing-locale and tableaux forms.

There are then the forms, which almost with design and purpose do not treat the two epics as sacred drama but interpret them as part of local culture. Often the content departs from the epics and the Kṛṣṇa theme and is based on the literary genres which developed in different regions. The Bhavāi and Tamāśā of Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Terukoothu, the Veethināṭakam and the Ottānthullāl of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Kerala, the Nautanki of U.P., the Khyāla of Rajasthan, the Bhāḍa Jashan of Kashmir and the procession theatre of Yātrā or Jātrā of Bengal, Orissa, Assam and Manipur, all fall into this category. Closely related to these, which are sometimes called street forms, are those performed in the precincts of a temple or village courtyard but which provide a link between the highly sophisticated drama and the improvised street theatre. They have a structure which is closer to the literary dramatic piece but is less rigorous. As examples can be mentioned the Aṅkiā-nāṭa of Assam, the Bhāmakalāpam of Andhra, the Bhāgavatamelā of Tamil Nadu, the Yakṣagāna of Karnataka. A class apart are forms like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam and which distinguish themselves from the others on account of their marked dependence on movement rather than the spoken word. An example in point is the dance-drama form known as the Chau with its three different versions from Seraikela, Burulia and Mayurbhanj.

The list is by no means exhaustive. For example, we have not included here the whole rich range of the puppet theatre which comprises glove, rod, and shadow puppet and string marionettes, the scroll-painting and narrative theatre, and innumerable others. Nevertheless, for purposes of study and analysis of the Indian performing arts this illustrative list, however sketchy, may suffice.

We may now try to correlate the different categories of performance in relation to the class or group of performers who are hereditarily trained artistes. Even a cursory glance will reveal that most of these performers do not belong to tribal societies but are members of village or rural communities. Further, except for the Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā and Aṅkiā nāṭa, all others are the special preserves of the semi-professionals or professionals and cannot be termed amateur recreational theatre, even if for some they may not be an economic vocation.

In the beginning we have spoken of the tribal social structure and the village or *grāma* structure. An analysis of village communities reveals that among these are several

who are known as the 'backward' classes but are not necessarily Śūdras in the traditional caste structure. Within the so-called 'backward' classes are the Vaīrāgis, the Binkäras, the Bhavāyās, the Gandharvas, the Bāuls, the Gājis and others. Many artistic forms mentioned above are the special preserve of these communities, and they seem to be the descendants of the semi-professionals and professionals listed in Pāṇiini's *Aṣṭādhyayī,* Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and other texts dating from 2nd century B.C. to 14th century A.D. The performers of Bhavāi, Tamāśā, Khyāl, Nautanki, Terukoothu, Veethinātakam, Bhāḍa Jashan belong to these classes. However, not all categories of performers come from the 'backward' classes. The performers of Chau are a varied lot ranging from the underprivileged of Purulia to the Vaiśyas and Kṣatriyas of Mayurbhanj, to the princes of Seraikela. On the other hand, Bhāmakalāpam, Yakṣagāna and Kuṭiyaṭṭam are largely, though not exclusively, performed by Brahmins or special subcastes, the Ambalavāsis of Kerala in the case of Kuṭiyaṭṭam being a typical instance. Some roles in the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi and the Rāsalīlā forms of Vrindavan are performed by Brahmin boys under fourteen. The Kṣatriyas largely, but again not exclusively, perform the Rāsa and Jātrās in Manipur.

From the above, it will be obvious that a classification in terms of castes and sub-castes reveals that theatre activity is not restricted to any one gruop or subgroup in society and that although most performers are professional or semi-professional, they range from the communities listed as the 'backward' classes to the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas. In short, social structuring forms a base but cannot give us a perfect criterion for the classification and subgroupings of these genres. Nevertheless, it is useful to bear in mind that while genres can be divided on the basis of content and form, they can also be classified in terms of the particular communities who have been the repositories of particular forms. An attempt has been made to classify these forms in terms of their regional distribution, in the class or caste of society and the literary content of their repertoire.

The growth of these forms can also be traced historically through archaeological and epigraphical evidence, literary source (including both chronicles and works of creative literature in Sanskrit), particularly from literature in the regional languages and from musical texts of the medieval period. This history can be reconstructed through a period ranging from the 2nd century B.C. to the 19th century A.D., especially betwen the 9th and 18th centuries A.D. This is a task too monumental to be undertaken in a study of this kind.

A superficial glance at the source material, however, convinces one of both their continuity and their tenacity for survival through many historical periods. They have originated, grown and developed through a political history marked by invasions, wars, downfall of kingdom, migrations and the growth of small principalities and states and the spread of socio-religious movements of extreme orthodoxy and of protest and dissent. Although no precise historical phasing or periodisation of the origin and growth of these forms can be attempted, it is nevertheless possible to date many of them. Some forms such as the ballad can be traced back to the Vedic and post-Vedic times; others to the period of classical Sanskrit literature of the 4th-5th century A.D.; yet others, such as

Kuṭiyaṭṭam to the 10th and 11th centuries. Many can be traced back to a later period, A.D. 1250 to 16th-17th century A.D., which is contemporaneous with the rise of regional literatures and a few are not more than fifty or a hundred years old when they evolved either through the impact of certain socio-political developments or through the individual genius of creative artists. Also, new forms are still evolving in contemporary India, both at the urban and the rural levels, in turn being enriched and enriching the already existing flow.

Our concern here is not to trace the historical development of these genres through the mass of source material which still needs to be collected, documented and analysed for purposes of any objective study. Our purpose is to study chiefly the contemporary manifestations, their linkages with similar manifestations in other parts of India and with each other in a particular region.

It is also not our purpose to undertake a close study of the technical and formal aspects through an analysis of the literary content, dramatic structure, musical melody, movement patterns, styles of costuming and make-up of each of these forms. This has been attempted in the case of a few forms but not all. Our effort has been to undertake a comparative study with a view to illustrating the phenomenon of unity and diversity, abstraction and concretization, interconnections of regions and interdependence of forms within a region, rather than a descriptive and analytical study of each form. This itself, we hope, will bear testimony to the rich and variegated fabric of what are known as the performing art traditions of India which cannot be classified merely as tribal or folk on the one hand and ritualistic or classical on the other. In our discussion, we have attempted to show the links with tribal and ritual practices on the one hand and the elements of the continuum of Sanskrit drama on the other. Regional grouping and blendings have also been identified with a view to pointing at the typical Indian phenomenon of mobility of one form from one region to another. In some cases groupings are possible by virtue of geo-physical proximity and literary traditions; sometimes it is the residual survival of a historical movement like the *Bhakti* movement which continues in some parts of India and not in others. Rāsalīlā forms of Vrindavan and Manipur typical instances. Again, the theatre spectacle contains a wide variety ranging from myth, legend, epics, lyrical poetry based on works like the *Gita Govinda,* to social-comedy, satire, earthy banter and pure innovation based on local history and political developments.

The content is contained in a flexible form which is capable of adaptation to local situations and temporality here and now. While the theme may be concerned with eternity at one level, it also invariably has a local colour and contemporary validity; the two levels of meaning are in built into the dramatic structure, be it the ballad form or the puppet or the street theatre or for that matter the more rigorously structured forms like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam, the Bhāmakalāpam or the Yakṣagāna.

In most forms there is a distinct carry-over of the structures and conventions of the Sanskrit theatre in their purposive denial of the unities of Time and Space and in their inclusion of the conventions of preliminaries of the *Indradhvaja pūrva-raṅga,* the division of the play into plots and subplots, their use of *Sandhis,* the utilisation of the

hero-heroine types as the *nāyaka* and the anti-heroes, and the all important roles of the *sūtradhāra* and *vidūṣaka*. Indeed, the *sūtradhāra* is used as an important device for interlinking phases and as chorus; the *vidūṣaka* is used to connect two dimensions of time, the past and the present. The world of gods and men is brought together by him, with freedom and sharp innovative skill which lends an air of earthy concern for the immediate life around. Although the highly organised division of space of the Sanskrit stage is lost to many of these forms in their contemporary manifestations, they still adhere to some rough and ready conventions of the *Kakṣavibhāga* (zonal divisions) of the Sanskrit stage. Also the stylized gesticulation pattern, particularly of the hands (*hastābhinaya*), is absent or minimal in most forms. In this respect, Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Bhāmakalāpam and Bhāgavatamelā are closely in a category. The Chau forms, whether dramatic as in Purulia or lyrical as in Seraikela or dance-drama epic as in Mayurbhanj, are a separate category not dominated by word but by gesture (principally of the lower limbs), a very well defined vocabulary of movement with very distinctive principles of articulation.

The puppet forms from different parts of India can also be regrouped on the basis of their particular media such as shadow, rod, glove and strings on the one hand, and by virtue of their content and their relative relationship with the live dance or drama forms of the region on the other. The Yakṣagāna and the puppet theatre of Karnataka, the Gombeyaṭṭa, are examples of this kind.

The scroll plays and the narrative ballads form another group, where the sung or the narrated word is illustrated through a visual form through gesticulation.

Despite these groupings and categories, their affinities and their consanguinity of approach, spirit and content, the distinctive style and technique of each form gives each a personality unique and autonomous, with an inner life and external methodology of communication.

The last and final question is who are the audiences and how do they differ from those of the tribal and village dances and community singing. In the latter, there is hardly and distinction between the participator, the actor-dancer, musicians, and the audience; all join in. In these forms, while large audiences participate through active response, there is a clear actor-dancer-musician and audience-spectator-listener demarcation.

This broad classification, it is hoped, will be evidence enough of the complexity of the situation which is seemingly spontaneous and unorganised in the modern sense, but one which has a structure. We shall attempt to describe and analyse some of these forms in the spatial and temporal situations in the following pages.

It would be possible to treat the forms in their regional distribution and take the forms of each region separately. It would also be possible to attempt to present them in a chronological order of their origin and evolution. Finally, one could also regroup them in terms of their formal stylistic features, which cut across regional boundaries and treat them together. Each of these approaches has a validity, but the first approach as mentioned has not been followed as some work has already been done on the regional basis. The second is likely to be hazardous if one does not first establish a chronology

and history and analyse primary source material, a task which cannot be undertaken by any single author in its entirety. Thus, for facility, the third approach has been adopted while keeping in view the first two. It has also been necessary to adopt this on account of the objective of this study, which is to show the interconnections among forms of a particular region on the one hand and those of different regions on the other. This alone, we think, can provide an identifiable thematic unity to the work which necessarily takes into account what may seem a medley of theatrical manifestations and experiences, unconnected and heterogeneous.

It is the belief of the author that only such an attempt, however broad, can present a picture of the traditions of the performing arts, while pointing at the same time at the processes of eternity and contemporaneity, continuity and change, unity and multiplicity, interdependence and autonomy, so typical of the Indian cultural phenomenon.

II

KUṬIYAṬṬAM

It is characteristic of Indian cultural traditions that a movement, form or style, originating in one part of India at a given historical period, finds its finest and mature flowering in a totally different distant part. There are ample evidences of this phenomenon, covering the fields of literature and the plastic and performing arts, throughout history, particularly since the 10th century. Indeed, as we go along, we shall observe that in spite of the distinctive regional and sometimes local identity of many forms and styles, a close look at them reveals their unmistaken relationships with similar forms in other regions and, of course, their connections with other forms in the same region.

If we take the example of Kerala, it is well known that apart from Kathākali, the tradition of Kuṭiyaṭṭam and the recitation and singing of the *Gīta-Govinda* are considered the two outstanding forms there. However, an analysis of both reveals that while the final resultant form is certainly regional in character, the origins have to be traced back to sources outside Kerala. Also, these two forms, like some others in Kerala and outside, provide examples of a theatrical spectacle moving on multiple planes and therefore containing within it the dimensions of eternity and at the same time a preoccupation with 'Time' here and now—in a word, with contemporaneity.

Kuṭiyaṭṭam is easily the most prominent survivor among the forms containing some essential elements of content and structural features of the Sanskrit theatre. It is, however, also the precursor and pioneer of traditions of the Indian theatre which developed in different parts of India since the 10th century, roughly coinciding with the breakdown of the unity provided by Sanskrit and the growth of regional languages and literature. Into its making went many elements, some drawn faithfully from the conventions of Sanskrit theatre, both in content and form, and others which were totally regional with tribal or ritualistic roots unique to Kerala. While scholars are correct in often calling Kuṭiyaṭṭam the only surviving tradition of Sanskrit theatre it must be remembered that Kuṭiyaṭṭam has also unmistaken links with and elements from traditions which have little or nothing to do with the Sanskrit theatre.

Before examining the different aspects of content, form and technique of this highly developed form, it is necessary to give a brief historical perspective of the state of Sanskrit theatre and its prevalence in the period immediately preceding the evolution of

Kuṭiyaṭṭam. It would also be necessary to draw attention to the regional schools of poetry, drama, dance and music which affected its growth.

It is well known that the dramatists Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti and Harṣa, all came from the North. The discovery of the manuscripts of the plays of Bhāsa, however, changed the accepted notion that the Sanskrit theatre tradition was restricted only to the North. Since the beginning of this century many more manuscripts have been discovered, which conclusively prove that the Sanskrit theatre traditions had reached Kerala early and that a continuous history of Sanskrit theatre of nearly eight hundred years can be reconstructed through this material. It is perhaps not an accident that the commentary of Abhinavagupta, the most outstanding commentator of the *Nāṭyaśāstra,* has been found in Kerala.

We know that the Sanskrit theatre as described by Bharata had in course of time given rise to the minor forms known as the *Uparūpakas.* We also know that already by the time of Harṣa a form of Sanskrit play called the *Saṅgīta nāṭaka* or *Saṅgītaka* had become popular. It would appear that Kuṭiyaṭṭam had direct links with these developments of the Sanskrit theatre.

Along with the general history of the evolution of Sanskrit theatre common to all parts of India we have to take into account the history of Kerala. Kerala has been known as the most active centre of trade from proto-historical times. It had commercial contacts with Egypt, Arabia, Babylon, Rome and China. It is inconceivable that in the process of exporting teakwood, sandlewood, spices and the rest it did not come into contact with the culture of the ancient civilizations. Indeed, Kerala also exemplifies another seeming Indian paradox, i.e., of the ability of forging ties, carrying on dialogue with alien cultures on the one hand, and, on the other, an equal ability to hold on to an 'orthodoxy' which cannot be penetrated. While certain aspects of Kerala's cultural life remained highly conservative and orthodox, there were others showing a remarkable capacity for communication and adaptation. The existence of these parallel tendencies can be seen in many aspects of Kerala's cultural history though nowhere else is it more eloquently illustrated than in its artistic traditions.

Megasthenes leaves us with a vivid account of Kerala in the 4th century B.C. This is preceded by the comments on the high degree of cultural development in both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata.* The Aśokan edicts speak of Keralāputra and these possibly refer to the dynasty of the Ceras, the most powerful line of kings of Kerala who ruled the country for over a thousand years. Although there was a decline in their fortunes in the 7th and 8th centuries, a second stable, secure empire of the Ceras seems to have been established by the 9th-10th century. The founder of this second empire was Kulaśekhara, whose descendents added the name Perumal to their names—'Perumal' denoting the King, Emperor. During this period, as in the proto-historical period, Kerala continued to develop its trade links with Abbasid, Byzantine, Constantinople, the Holy Roman Empire, Tang China, Baghdad, Cambodia and Sumatra. Vast urban complexes grew up, specially in the Vanci-Muziris region: Mahodayapuram was the new name of the capital. King Kulaśekhara Varman of the second Cera dynasty is considered the

author of the tradition of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam. He was the author of two dramas, *Subhadrād-hanañjayam* and *Tāptīsaṁvaraṇam*. The political history of the region, the connections with the neighbouring Tamil kingdoms and the ability of dialogue with the world outside did certainly have a bearing on the King's creative abilities as a reviver and reformer of the Sanskrit stage.

The political history of Kerala must be supplemented by its social and cultural history, especially as it affected and continues to condition artistic traditions and performance.

It may not be possible here to go into the complex structure of the Kerala society. However, it is necessary to point out that development of forms like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam are directly related as much to the rigid caste structure of the society as to the inbuilt channels of mobility and change within the seemingly hierarchical and insultaive groupings. At this point only one fact needs to be mentioned and that is about the relationship between the Nāmbudiris and the Nāyars on the one hand and between the Cākyars and the Nāmbudiris on the other. Brahmin groups, immigrants into Kerala, assumed authority early. The ruling princes were transformed as Kṣatriyas: the incessant wars with the Colas led to the emergence of the military class known as the Nāyars or Nāirs. However, there was considerable social communication among the Nāmbudiris, the Brahmins, the Nāirs and the Kṣatriyas: except the eldest son, the other sons of the Nāmbudiris could marry Nāir women. The hereditary Cākyars belong to this social structure and their origins can also be traced back to early Kerala history. It is interesting to note that Cākyars belong to the Ambalavāsi (temple-dwellers) caste, an intermediate group between the Brahmins and the Nāirs. While the Ambalavāsis work as servants in the temple, the Cākyars are a special subcaste. It appears that if a Nāmbudiri woman is suspected of adultery, she is placed under suspension and the privileges she enjoys as a wife are temporarily withdrawn, till her guilt or innocence is proved. If adjudged by the elders of the community as guilty, she is outcasted. If during the period (i.e., between the date of her offence and the date she is outcasted) a male child is born, he becomes a Cākyar, and if it is a female child, she becomes a Nāṅgyār. The beginnings of the Cākyars go back to these social practices, which illustrate the dictum of Bharata that the theatre breaks social barriers and that it is a fifth Veda open to all, irrespective of caste and creed. This sociological fact casts considerable interesting light on the role of the arts in cutting across caste barriers and becoming instruments of communication in an otherwise rigid social structure.

The origins of the Cākyars can perhaps be traced back to pre-Sanskrit days, or to the period of the *Śilappadikaram,* the Tamil classic. The writing of the first plays of Kuṭiyaṭṭam and the development of Cākayarkuṭṭu thus has obvious links with a social structure which recognized a certain class of persons as professionals with theatre as 'vocation.' We must also refer to one other important social institution, namely, that of the naṭṭukulam or the village assembly.

The brief sketch can be further reinforced by references to other aspects of social and economic life of Kerala, which have no doubt left an imprint on the development of

Kuṭiyaṭṭam, particularly the role of the *vidūṣaka,* but this we shall examine when we analyse the structure of Kuṭiyaṭṭam.

Now, let us turn to general artistic history of Kerala, which is indispensable for an understanding of the literary and theatrical qualities of a form like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam.

Although there has been much controversy about the origin of Malayalam language, it is today recognized that the *toṭṭams* were the earliest compositions, which antedate the prevalence of either Tamil or Sanskrit in Kerala. *Toṭṭams* or chants, ballads or songs were naturally in the traditions of oral poetry and continued to influence the evolution of Malayalam, even when it came into contact with Tamil and, later, Sanskrit. During the first and second phases of the Cera dynasty Tamil or more specifically Centamil was the State language. The two most outstanding works are the *Patitruppaṭṭu*, a poetic saga extolling ten generations of the Ceras, and the renowned *Śilappadikaram* attributed by scholars like Dr. P. Nair and Dr. Meenakshisundaram to Ilango Adigal, the brother of King Cenkuttuvan who is supposed to have flourished in the 2nd century. Early Malayalam and Tamil thus must have grown up simultaneously from the proto-Dravidian tongue. However, since Centamil became the official language of the State there was an admixture of the two between the 2nd and 7th centuries. Into the situation of the Tamil-Malayalam entered a new factor, ie., the advent of Sanskrit. Another language blend emerged in Kerala and this was of Malayalam and Sanskrit, known as the Maṇipravāla, maṇi (Malayalam) standing for ruby and pravāla (Sanskrit) for coral. The writing of the first plays of Kuṭiyaṭṭam coincides with the literature in Maṇipravāla in Kerala.

We must thus remember that there were several parallel developments in language and literature in Kerala by the time Kulaśekhara wrote his plays. Original Malayalam poetry, its ballads and chants were in existence in the rich traditions of the Centamil literature which had flourished for many centuries. Co-existent were the establishment of several schools of Sanskrit learning and Hindu, Buddhist and Jain thought which reached Kerala early. Many schools of academies of Vedic, Buddhist and Jain thought grew up. By the 8th century Kerala seems to have assimilated Sanskrit so totally that literature of many disciplines was written in that language. This is borne out by the many works on grammar, linguistics, philosophy (including that of Śaṅkara), astronomy, science, architecture, sculpture and music which were composed in Kerala between the 6th and 16th centuries, all in Malayalam script but in Sanskrit language. It is not surprising, therefore, that Kulaśekhara, the author of the two Kuṭiyaṭṭam plays, should reflect the contemporary situation of Kerala which presented a picture of a unique blend of many strands, both social and cultural, some which had links with traditions outside Kerala and some which were wholly indigenous to the region.

Developments in the other arts, particularly those of architecture, sculpture, painting and music, are also relevant for understanding the growth of Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Although no early examples of architecture survive, even the late ones of theatre architecture exhibit identifiable links with architectural features of the theatre described in the *Nāṭyaśastra.* In temple architecture, Kerala follows the Dravidian styles: the most authentic contribution is of the circular temple discussed in the Sanskrit texts of the post 6th century. This

architectural feature is indigenous to many tribes and villages of Kerala. The architectural remains belonging to the 10th century, and particularly to the post 13th and 14th, manifest the typical features of the regional school of architecture. The Kuṭṭambalam, the traditional theatre of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, has some affinities with the larger Indian or Sanskrit tradition on the one hand and yet exhibits a distinctive, almost uniqe, regional character on the other. We shall have occasion to examine this in some detail in our discussion of the presentation of Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Texts dating from the 10th to 16th centuries provide elaborate descriptions of the architectural plans of theatres, etc., and these can be co-related to the existing structures in Kerala, particularly that of the Vaṭakkunathan temple in Trichur.

Both the *Śilappadikaram* and the *Patitrupaṭṭu* provide valuable internal evidence of the state of poetry, music and dance. The musical forms prevalent in Kerala prior to the advent of the *Gita-Govinda* in the 15th-16th century have much in common with the musical culture of Tamil Nadu. In course of time it evolved its own techniques, the most important of them being the style of singing adapted for Kathākali today. The Kuṭiyaṭṭam traditions utilise, as in the case of the langauge, both the pure recitative forms which can be traced back to the Vedic chanting and the *rāgas* of Karnatak music. Many rāgas used in Kuṭiyaṭṭam have a close similarity with the rāgas of the Karnatak system. Besides, many forms of dance are described in the literary works in Malayalam and connections between some of these and the traditions of dance prevalent in Kerala can perhaps be traced if a close analysis is undertaken. So far regional scholars have not attempted it.

Rājā Kulaśekhara, in writing his particular form of drama, must have been directly or indirectly influenced by varied and parallel streams which were integral to the cultural development of Kerala. Although it is not conclusively proved that he was acquainted with the vast body of Sanskrit literature prevalent outside Kerala, it would be reasonable to assume that he was not unaware of the works of the Pallava King Mahendra Vikrama or Varman as he is also called, who was the author of *Mattavilāsam* and *Bhagavadajjukiyam.* The two plays of Harṣa, namely *Nāgānandam* and *Ratnāvalī,* were also popular and had travelled to different parts of India. It is also possible that Bhāsa's plays were staged in the courts of the Pallava Kings. The *Bharatavākyam* of *Avantī-Sundarīkathā* mentions that Mātṛdatta was a friend of Daṇḍin. *Kuṭṭnimaṭṭam* of Dāmodaragupta, where there is a vivid description of the presentation of *Ratnāvalī,* may perhaps also have travelled to Kerala prior to the writing of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam plays by Rājā Kulaśekhara. The amazing mobility of creative works from one part of India to a distant region is a recurring and typical phenomenon.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the author of the first two plays, clearly identified as Kuṭiyaṭṭam, incorporated many elements of the Sanskrit theatre and yet imbued them with a local colour and a distinctive style which made them typically regional in character. It is said, although not historically proved, that the king was ably assisted by a Brahmin scholar known as Tolan. Scholars such as R.V. Poduval and Kunnjuni Rājā agree that perhaps it was Tolan rather than the king who was responsible for introducing into the Sanskrit drama the use of the local language through the mouth of the *viduṣaka,*

the parody of the four *Puruṣārthas,* the confining of the presentation of these plays to the Cākyar community and the laying down of elaborate procedures for the preliminaries in the acting of the plays. With the introduction of these elements what emerged was a distinctly autonomous form with vital links to the Sanskrit theatre on one plane and the local traditions on the other. Also by the introduction of the local language through the *vidūṣaka* and the liberty taken by him to ridicule the four *Puruṣārthas,* the dominant note of keeping in touch with contemporaneity was introduced.

In course of time, about the 12th century, the practice of Kuṭiyaṭṭam led to the writing of the manuals and texts which gave theoretical sanction and laid down rules and procedures of performance, the most important of these manuals being the *Aṭṭaprakāram* written in Maṇipravāla, and the *Kramadīpikā.* The first details the techniques of acting and elaborates on the meanings of the verses, in the form of a sustained story, in order to assist the actor in enacting through gestures and movements the content of the play. The second lays down the rules, regulations and procedures for staging these plays and the treatment of the songs, dances, *rāgas,* and the rest.

Another related developement was that of Cākyar Kuttu, which either broke away from the Kuṭiyaṭṭam or grew up as a parallel form. Narratives of selected stories were compiled together to form what has come to be known as *Prabandhas.* Indeed, the name *Prabandha Kuttu* has come to denote the art of story-telling by the Cākyar. The literary compositions were invariably in Sanskrit and rested heavily on Purāṇic stories: *Bharata Prabandha* and *Rāmāyaṇa Prabandha* are typical examples. The narration depends for the most part on the recitative skills of actor and his capacity to reinforce it with suitable gestures, wit and elegance of style: polyvalence of acting ability is the essence of the performance. There is no musical accomplishment except a large copper drum called the Milav or Mizhāvu, common both to Cākyar Kuttu and Kuṭiyaṭṭam.

Kuṭiyaṭṭam is the evolved dramatic form where both men and women take part. Since Kulaśekhara wrote his plays the repertoire has been greatly enlarged and today nearly a dozen Kuṭiyaṭṭam plays are known to Kerala. Some of these are adaptations (or recensions) of earlier Sanskrit plays, presented in Kuṭiyaṭṭam style, others are original plays written for a Kuṭiyaṭṭam performance.

Subhadrādhanañjayam and *Tāptisaṁvaraṇam,* are attributed to Kulaśekhara. Othes are *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* of Śaktibhadra; *Nāgānandam* of Harṣa; *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇam, Svapnavāsavadattā, Pratimānāṭakam, Bālacharitam* and *Abhiṣekanāṭakam* of Bhāsa; *Mattavilāsam* and *Bhagavadajjukiyam* of King Mahendra Vikrama; and *Dūtaghaṭotkacam* and *Kalyāṇa Saugandhikam* of Nīlakaṇṭha.

Creative and textual literature of the subsequent centuries, including the manuals and texts of dance, drama and music, and architectural texts (such as the *Śilparatna*), all dating from the 12th to 18th centuries provide valuable source material for reconstructing the development of Kuṭiyaṭṭam. The community and status of the actors, the milieu in which it was performed, the stage-construction, the acting techniques and musical instruments used are all mentioned in these texts. The *Sandeśa Kāvya* in Malayalam often refers to the performances of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam. We are told that the *Unnunilisandeśa*

mentions a performance of the *Tāptisaṁvaraṇam* at the Tali temple and the *Kokasandeśa* mentions that a Kuttu was performed in *maṇḍapa* of the Tripraуār temple. From a perusal of these texts and manuals of architecture, music and dance it appears that between the 10th and 18th centuries there was an impressive literary, dramatic and musical activity and many new forms in literature, such as the *paṭṭus*, the *campus*, Rāmanāṭṭam, Kṛṣṇāṭṭam and finally Kathākali, evolved. Musical modes underwent a change with the impact of Vaiṣṇavism and *Gīta-Govinda*. Kuṭiyaṭṭam performances nevertheless continued and survived through the guarded discipline of the Cākyar families who became the sole repositories of both the literary and theatrical traditions of this particular form of theatre. According to scholars, there were 18 Cākyar families who became the sole repositories of both the literary and theatrical traditions of this particular form of theatre. According to scholars, there were 18 Cākyar families who performed the Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Some years ago Kunnjuni Rāja listed six such families and today only three can be mentioned. Among the best known performers are Koyappa Rāma Cākyar of Painkulam, Maṇi Mādhava Cākyar of Potiyil and Ammannūr Mādhava Cākyar.

The Cākyars are not only actors and hereditary theatre artists but have also been literary figures and authors. In the 14th century was written *Śrivilāsa* which is attributed to Dāmodara of Mannanam: he is also supposed to have written a *campu* called the *Unniyacicaritam*.

Nīlakaṇṭha was also a Cākyar. The surviving families of the Cākyars are the direct descendents of those whose works have come down to us and who are frequently referred to in other works of Malayalam literature during the last eight hundred years or more.

However, the secret of the survival of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam lies as much in the ability of the Cākyar community to safeguard and preserve traditions of an earlier epoch as in their ability to adapt to new situations, to respond to local and immediate concerns, and to be flexible enough to be able to give their presentation contemporary validity and significance. Had the Cākyars merely restricted themselves to the form which was given to them by Kulaśekhara, there was every chance of the breakdown or the annihilation of the tradition. The innovative flexibility which was provided by the Tolan to the character of the *vidūṣaka* through the use of local dialect and the liberty of ridiculing the four sacrosanct *Puruṣārthas* must have given the form enough scope of renewal, re-interpretation and improvisation. The Kuṭiyaṭṭam traditions today are thus not museum pieces of a distant past, but belong to contemporary India through their satire, social comment and concern with here and now. Our justification for including this highly evolved and structured form is that it is a key to the understanding of the Indian cultural phenomenon where a piece of contemporary theatre embodies many moments of the past and is an amalgam of many traditions, some strictly *Śāstrīya* and universally Indian, others totally local or regional and contemporary. It also exemplifies the relationship of the forms to traditions in the region, such as Kathākali (we shall presently see how) etc., and to traditions outside the region (Yakṣagāna, Bhāgavatamelā, etc.)

But all this is the historical past, the temporal and the spatial situation in which the form flourished and evolved. What about the theatrical presentation itself? What does it

constitute, how does it move, and what are its chief tools of technique and implements of communication? The first and foremost is the physical space in which it is performed, the theatre called the Kuṭṭambalam. In Kerala, there survive a few examples of the Kuṭṭambalam (*nāṭyamaṇḍapa* of the Sanskrit tradition), important among which are the *nāṭyamaṇḍapa* of the Tirumuzhikulam Viṣṇu temple, Parur and the Vaṭakkunathan temple theatre, Trichur. It is likely that the author of the first plays of Kuṭiyaṭṭam was also a builder of *nāṭyamaṇḍapa*: tradition associates him with the building of the Kṛṣṇa temple at Thirukulaśekharapuram near Tiruvanchikulam. However, the surviving Kuṭṭambalam and *nāṭyamaṇḍapas* belong to a much later period than the reign of Kulaśekhara. The architectural style of these *maṇḍapa* shares to a large extent the architectural features of Kerala temples. Temples during the period• (A.D. 800-1000) were generally built on square, circular or apsidal architectural plans. The main temple or Śrīkovil has a detached *namaskāramaṇḍapa* built on a square plan with a pyramidal roof. Some temples do not have the *namaskāramaṇḍapas*; nevertheless, they all seem cloistered together on account of the nālambālam which encloses the Śrīkovil and *namaskāramaṇḍapa.*

Of the three types of ground-plans, the square, circular and apsidal, the circular temples are distinctive to Kerala. The architectural style of the Kuṭṭambalam shares the features of the square and circular temples of Kerala.

There is valuable textual material on the construction of Kuṭṭambalam: most of this, however, belong to a period long after the 9th and 10th centuries. While it is not certain that these structures existed at the time of Kulaśekhara, he certainly took the architectural style and floor pattern of the theatre into account while evolving the methodologies of the presentation of Kuṭiyaṭṭam.

There are, as is well known, many scattered references to the *nāṭyamaṇḍapa* (or *nṛttamaṇḍapa*) and *nāṭyaśālā* in Sanskrit literature. The epics, particularly the *Mahābhārata,* describe the *nṛtyaśālās*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* devotes its full second chapter to a description of the different types of theatres. Later, texts of architecture, sculpture and even music allude to the *nāṭyamaṇḍapa.* The 10th and 11th century texts such as *Mayamaṭa Mānasāra* and *Iśānaśiva gurudeva paddati* provide valuable material. Finally two texts from Kerala of the 16th century, *Śilparatna* and *Trantrasamuccaya,* contain precise descriptions of the construction of the Kuṭṭambalam or *nāṭyamaṇḍapa.* It must be noted that these texts do not in all cases precede the surviving examples of the Kuṭṭambalam in Kerala. Three imporant Kuṭṭambalams can be seen in the Perumanan, Irinjalakkuda and the Vaṭakkunanthan temples.

A complete and full discussion of the construction of the Kuṭṭambalam is outside the purview of the present work. Suffice it to point out that the texts as well as the actual archaeological survivals bear testimony to the fact that the Kuṭṭambalam was part and parcel of the temple complex with a well-conceived plan and basic layout. It is found on the right side of the installed deity and the texts prescribe this placement. All the Kerala theatres (i.e., those that are near the temples) face the deity in the temple in a parallel axis.

The Kuṭṭambalam is usually a rectangular structure although the one at Cengannur was egg shaped. Unfortunately, only the pedestal of the latter remains. A model of this can be found in the Trivandrum museum.

Most of the rectangular ones follow a similar pattern, including the one in the Vaṭakkunathan temple in Trichur. As for temple architecture, definite proportions are prescribed for the Kuṭṭambalam. These proportions and measurements closely resemble the *Vikṛṣṭa* type of theatre described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The basic unit of measurement is the *pāda* and definite ratios are prescribed between the total perimeter, the width and the length of the theatre. Thus, if the total is of twenty-four parts, the width will be ten parts; when divided into sixteen parts, six parts should form part of the width according to the *Śilparatna* (see Clifford Jones, *Journal of the American Society*, 93.3, 1973 for a full discussion). In short, just as in the case of other architectural designs and formulae for sculpture, the texts precribe the basic unit, proportion and ratio and within which variations are possible. Given the fundamental shape and proportion, a size can be determined of the base, i.e., the stone socle, the *adhiṣṭhāna* on which the main body (the elevation) and the roof rest. The Kuṭṭambalam belongs to the *prasāda* structure of the temple and is a unit (*aṅga*) of the complex; the proportions adopted for it are or should be in harmony with the other temple structures, specially the other *maṇḍapas*. We have similar constructional basis for temples and *maṇḍapas* in other parts of India. The distinctive feature of the Kuṭṭambalam is the roof which is a rectangular flat structure steeply sloping downwards ending in edges with sculptural motifs such as snakehoods, etc. The angle at which roof shapes is almost invariably a perfect 45 degrees from the apex of the roof peak (*Kūṭa*). The roof is supported on beams resting on rows of small sized pillars. There are usually thirty rafters (or beams) on the longer side and twenty-two on the shorter sides, each divided equally into fifteen-and-fifteen and eleven-and-eleven. All these form a kind of 'trellis' walls, supported by the pillars below which are shorter on the outside and higher in the inside. The pillars and the beams rest on the flat surface of the stone socle, the *adhiṣṭhāna*. The finished roof is naturally covered by copper or tile and mortar and is decorated with the conventional motifs of the *pūrṇa-ghaṭa*, etc.

The auditorium and the stage area are clearly demarcated. The stage is normally a square or nearly a square on a raised platform. It is so constructed that it nearly always faces the diety and the actors perform facing the god. It is made of a hollow stone base, which is filled with earth and rubble and plastered with cow-dung. On each side is a pillar, painted and lacquered in bright red: these pillars support an inner roof over the stage.

At the back of the stage is the wall of the *nepathya* or dressing room. Two narrow doors make for entrance and exist of actors, reminiscent of the descriptions in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Between the two doors are placed the two copper drums or mizhāvus, the basic accompaninent of Kuṭiyaṭṭam: they are placed in a cage-like wooden frame, called *piñjara*.

The *nepathya* or green room is a narrow rectangular room running parallel to the

width of the stage usually lower than the stage level, occasionally at the same level as the auditorium floor. The stage pillars are different in shape, design and colouring than the auditorium pillars. Their distribution on the acting area helps the audience and enables the actor to establish particular 'locale' for the different scenes even within this limited space. The auditorium area is one level lower than the stage area. Sometimes raised on either side of the stage right or left, possibly corresponding to the *mattavārṇI* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra.* (over which there has been much controversy amongst Sanskrit scholars.) The auditorium has rows of large pillars on either side, front and back and smaller ones on the outside and still smaller ones on the outer side. The pillars are made of wood or stone, or sometimes with a stone base and wooden pillar, all these end in an ornamental shaft or capital. The whole gives the effect of a concave hut like structure which is richly adorned and proportionately laid out spatially inside, with multiple roofs, gables and reefs. Indeed, the outside of a Kuṭṭambalam gives no impression of the inner design and structure of the stage or the auditorium.

Even this brief description of the Kuṭṭambalam will make it clear that the Kuṭiyaṭṭam and other forms of drama were presented in a highly formalized constructed structure which took into account stage, green room and auditorium areas. The play itself is performed in this Kuṭṭambalam and is in turn a highly evolved form of drama with many intricate preliminaries and preludes. A full performance takes many nights to perform. The preliminaries constitute an important part of the performance and are essential to other forms of dance and dance-drama in other parts of India.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes many preliminaries called the *Pūrvaraṅga* and Bharata devotes two chapters to it. The Kuṭiyaṭṭam performance today is a direct carry-over of this tradition, although in some details the two differ.

As we had seen, the two drums, the mizhāvus, are placed between the two doors: besides there is the Kuzhittāla played by the Nānyār (Nāṅgyār or the woman musician). She is also the singer and the vocalist: this is unlike Kathākali where all the actors and the musicians are males. There is then the Iḍakkā played with a small stick and which is common to Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali as accompaniment to singing in the temples before the deity. Finally, there are the two wind instruments, namely the Kompa (a kind of trumpet, unknown to Kathākali) and the Kurun-Kuzhal or Kuchal (pipe). The two wind instrumentalists stand next to the drum (mizhāvu) players. Sometimes a *Śankha* (conch) is added. The whole ensemble constitutes the orchestra called the *pañcavādya.* The performance beings with the lighting of the bell-metal oil lamp, with two wicks facing the actor and the facing the audience. The eight auspicious offerings, called the *Aṣṭamaṅgala,* consist of different grains, fruits, flowers, etc. and are also placed close by. The mizhāvu drum is tuned and the Nambyār plays on it accompanied by cymbals and the song sung by the Nānyār (also known as Nāṅgyār). The song invokes deities like Gaṇapati, Sarasvatī and Śiva. The invocation to Gaṇapati or Sarasvatī and sometimes Śiva are also common to preliminaries of other dance forms in almost all parts of India. These songs are either called *goṣṭhi* or Akkiṭṭa Kuṭṭuka.

The next sequence is the *Nambyaruṭe Tamil* wherein the Nambyār presents a brief

résumé of the story to be enacted. This is often pure Malayalam with plenty of Sanskrit words. Next, the stage is cleaned by sprinkling with water: this is known as the Arannutali. The Nambyār leaves the drum after the Akkiṭṭa fetches sacred water from the green room, sprinkles it and recites the *maṅgalaśloka*. This is followed by the *dhruva* verses sung by the female musician, the Nāṅgyār: these verses allude to the previous birth of the character who is going to appear on the stage. These correspond closely to the *dhruva* songs alluded to in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The *dhruva* songs set the tone of the play and are sung in appropriate *rāgas*.

Then enter two persons holding a curtain before the entrance of the main character can take place. The actor comes and stands behind the curtain to the accompaniment of the music of the Mizhāvu drums and other instruments. Later, he performs many steps and movements to the accompaniment of the singing Nānyār. The formal entrance of the actor is immediately followed by the *purappadu* (a feature also common to Kathākali) and various interpretative movements known as the Kriyācaviṭtaka where the actor takes up the interpretation of the first three lines of the first verse of the drama. Many abstract movements are also performed behind the curtain corresponding to the *cāris, karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The *cāris, karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras* we know are abstract cadences of movement which are prescribed as part of the preliminaries of the play in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The manuals of Kuṭiyaṭṭam use many technical terms to describe these movements and gaits. Some of these terms are obscure today, but it may be safely assumed that they refer to a known vocabulary of movement and correspond to *cāris, gatis*, etc., although one must not seek their identification with the sculptural depiction of these movements in Tamil Nadu and other places.

The first day's performance ends with these movements or *kriyās*. The basic stance is a 'grand plié open position' or what may be identified with the *mandalasthāna* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and space is covered in rectangles. The *nṛitta* position of Kathākali owes much to these movements originally evolved for Kuṭiyaṭṭam. These preliminaries constitute an important part of the performance of Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Indeed, these preliminaries which went out of vogue from the purely spoken drama of the urban theatre, continue to be an integral part of all forms of village theatre in India, including the temple, the street arena and the procession. They survive in all traditional forms in a variety of ways. In many only Gaṇeśa is invoked; in others like the Chau forms, a vertical pole representing the axis *mundi* or Śiva is consecrated, installed and invoked. In Kuṭiyaṭṭam the invocatory verses of the *purappadu* links it to forms like Rāmanāṭṭam and Kṛṣṇāṭṭam of Kerala, Bhāgavatamelā of Tamil Nadu, Yakṣagāna of Karnataka and Bhāmakalāpam of Andhra.

The next phase, i.e., of *nirvāhaṇa*, also a preliminary rite, is unique to the Kuṭiyaṭṭam. This begins on the second day. The character introduces himself by presenting his personal history prior to the 'time-span' which is the subject matter of the play proper. Since most characters and heroes belong to known myth and legend, the actor chooses freely the particular myth or legend associated with the character. The flash-back technique is very dexterously utilised, either by narrating incidents backward

one by one or forward, i.e., beginning with the birth or youth and moving to the time present. The first is known as *Anukrama* and the second as *Saṁkṣepa*. The *nirvāhaṇa* is a clever device for both solo monoacting and character portraiture which sets the tenor of the actual dramatic performance. The Indian drama for the best part does not lay great emphasis on character development and growth: the Kuṭiyaṭṭam tradition provides a full scope for character delineation through the convention of the *nirvāhaṇa*. It is significant to note that the actor on the stage does not use any speech in this phase; the verses are recited by the Nānyār and follow the pantomime presented by the dancer/actor rather than preceding it. In this respect, the Kuṭiyaṭṭam adheres to some techniques of *abhinaya* described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, particularly the conventions of *śuchi* and *aṅkara* forms of *āngikābhinaya*.

After the *nirvāhaṇa* of a single character which may last for one, two or more nights, begins another phase where the *vidūṣaka* (the clown) is introduced. The appearance of the stock character on the Kuṭiyaṭṭam stage establishes the relationship with the Sanskrit drama where also the *vidūṣaka* plays an important role. The character links this form with the other forms which evolved in all parts of India. Like the preliminaries, the *vidūṣaka's* role as communicator between high and low, past and present provides a strong basis of commonality amongst seemingly heterogenous forms throughout India. In Kerala, Tolan, the Brahmin priest of Kulaśekhara, is credited with the authorship of the introduction of the parody on the *Puruṣārthas*, etc. This tradition of providing complete immunity to the character of the *vidūṣaka* where he can lash out at anyone on any level or status of society is another feature which has kept Kuṭiyaṭṭam alive, in continuous touch with contemporaneity and large masses of people. Practically, all other dance-drama forms also use this character and we shall presently see his unique and significant role in all these dance-drama forms. Unlike the *nirvāhaṇa* of other characters, the *vidūṣaka* speaks his own lines, mostly in Malayalam in which he also uses a flash-back technique of presenting his life-history. The method of his presentation and the acting techniques are sometimes different from those employed by the other actors. The *Puruṣārthas* are ironically classified under four broad categories, namely, (i) *vañcanā,* deception with all its subtleties in stage craft, thieving and the rest; (ii) *rasanā,* satisfaction of the palate, the joy of eating, feasting, gluttony; (iii) *rājasevā,* loyalist behaviour towards the crown; and (iv) *vinoda,* the sheer joy of sense pleasure. We see thus that the four esteemed goals of *artha, kāma, dharma* and *mokṣa* of Hindu life come in for much ridicule and the *vidūṣaka* uses the weapons of sharp satire, wit, humour and sarcasm to comment on any contemporary situation. The highly ritualistic and esoteric character of the preliminaries—the invocations and the highly structured movements of the *nirvāhaṇa* of the other characters—is in direct contrast to the freedom and improvisations of the *vidūṣaka* which brings Kuṭiyaṭṭam at once near to the people in time here and now. The character who plays the role of the *vidūṣaka* is at perfect liberty to move freely from the world of gods to that of kings and Brahmins and commoners. The elements of social protest, dissent and bitter sarcasm are beautifully interwoven and the audience enjoys the free castigation of the royalty, higher castes, poets, administrators

and all others in power. The *vidūṣaka* of Kuṭiyaṭṭam thus belongs to a different category than the *vidūṣaka* of Sanskrit drama, where he does not depart from the text of the plays. Here he improvises, interpolates and has the freedom for wide deviations and departures. In this respect, the Kuṭiyaṭṭam heralds a totally new tradition in Indian theatre, a tradition which has continued and survived in practically all temple and street theatre forms. In stage technique, although *vidūṣaka* is master of the spoken word (i.e., *vācikābhinaya*), in contrast to the kinetic and pantomime technique of the *nirvāhaṇa* of other characters, he is a consummate artist who understands and reinterprets the Sanskrit verses and the gestures of the main character. He also gives discourses on or debates the basic tenets of philosophic schools and religious dogmas.

The other characters appear sequentially and go through the same technique of presenting their life-history and also presenting movements of the *purappadu*. All these introductions can take anything from three to eleven or fourteen nights. The play itself may not last for more than three or four nights: in this last phase the literary text is adhered to more closely and there is faster dramatic action. The plot moves swiftly till the play comes to an end with all characters except the hero making an exit and the final invocation or Muṭiyakkiṭa is sung by the Nānyār. The Nambyār plays on the Mizhāvu (the drum) and the Cākyar once again ends with a dance sequence of abstract movement. The latter concludes by washing his feet, extinguishes one of the wicks of the lamp (kuṭṭuvilakku) and again lights one wick in it. Thus concludes the Kuṭiyaṭṭam performance which begins and ends with elaborate ritual and contains elements of highly stylized theatre, communication techniques based on the word-sound movement and symbolic gesticulation, as also earthy satire, banter and realistic presentation.

The structure of a Kuṭiyaṭṭam performance can be broken up into neat sequence such as (i) the initial ritual or invocatory; (ii) *purappadu* and other preliminaries behind the curtain which contain the body of *nṛtta* technique of the form: (iii) *nirvāhaṇa* of the character which is solo-acting with much *abhinaya* but little pure dancing; (iv) *nirvāhaṇa* of the *vidūṣaka;* (v) the presentation of the play where all actors chant or speak their lines and gesticulate; and (vi) the final benediction.

Most of the texts of plays which today constitute the repertoire of Kuṭiyaṭṭam are supported by their *Aṭṭaprakāram* and their *Kramadīpikā*, i.e., manuals, commentaries and annotations which lay down staging techniques and may be considered not so much as theoretical texts but as stage scripts for help and guidance of actors. Indeed, the commentaries of Rāghavabhatt and Kallināth serve the same purpose for many Sanskrit plays. These commentaries throw light on the multiple meaning of verses and the enacting techniques and conventions of establishing zones (acting areas) or locales which should be followed.

The Kuṭiyaṭṭam manuals like many dance texts and commentaries found in Kerala elaborate and develop this tradition. The word-gesture relationship in the concepts of *vācika* and *āngikābhinaya* of the Sanskrit stage and *Nāṭyaśāstra* is taken further here by exploring the possibilities not only of multiple meaning but also of the syllables and syntax of a sentence. Inter-questions and answers characterize the interpretative portions

of the *āngikābhinaya:* elaboration and ornamentation on the text are encouraged and permissible. This tradition perhaps culminated in that of the coliyaṭṭam and manodharma in Kathākali. However, the highly developed and stylized techniques of Kuṭiyaṭṭam remain a class by themselves and have never been excelled by any other dance or drama or theatrical forms in India.

Here then is an amalgam of spoken word, recited and sung by the Nambyārs and the Nānyār and chanted by the hero, *vidūṣaka* and other characters during the main body of the play; instrumental music which precedes, follows and accompanies movement which is abstract as in *purappadu* and other preliminaries; movement that is interpretative through a highly evolved language of hand gestures (*hastābhinaya)* and facial gestures (*mukhābhinaya*), as also the movement of the eyes (*netrābhinaya*) performed by actors who use costume and make-up through a symbolism of colour and design. The whole ultimately seeks to invoke the inner states of mind and being. All this is presented on a theatre specially built for the purpose where acting areas are clearly demarcated and lighting is subdued but clearly designed. In traditional terms, all the four types of *abhinaya* (enacting) are used to the fullest, independently and in conjunction with each other.

As has been mentioned above, the *vācikabhinaya* can be broken up into the following five divisions. First, there is the recitation of the Sanskrit and Prākrit passages through a method which is unique to Kuṭiyaṭṭam: this is a slow syllable by syllable recitation. While this kind of recitation does not correspond completely to that of the *Ṛgveda* and *Yajurveda*, there are certain common elements and the affinities are unmistakable. The *Ṛg* and *Yajur* use three registers in the *anudātta, udātta,* and *svarita.* The *Sāma gāna* instead calls for use of five or six notes, and the musicality lies in the elongation of the notes. The recitation of the Cākyars known as Svarthil sholluka is midway between the recitation of the *Ṛg, Yajur* and *Sāmaveda.* There are many different modes of recitation and connoisseurs of Kuṭiyaṭṭam have identified twenty such different moods of recitation. Special recitation techniques are used by particular characters, others are used for expressing particular moodes and states (*bhāva* and *rasa*) and yet others for purely descriptive purposes of external situations.

The second component of *vācikābhinaya* is the vocal music of the Nānyār who sings the invocatory verses. The benedictory verses fall into a second category and the manner of their recitation is quite different from the recitation techniques of the actors, the Cākyars.

Thirdly, there is the music of the Nambyār the rendering of which has a distinct tonality.

Fourthly, there are the prose renderings of *vidūṣaka* which demand yet another mode and method of voice production and speech articulation.

Finally, there are the *ślokas*, the verses of the play itself, constituting the fifth component of *vācikābhinaya*. Each *śloka*, is set to a particular *rāga* corresponding to particular situations, types, moods, or to particular animal or bird world, season of the year, time of day, etc. Nearly twenty such *rāgas* are frequently used in the Kuṭiyaṭṭam

repertoire. The *rāga* Indola, for example, is associated with the *dhīrodātta,* the *ceti-pañcama* with low characters, the ārtan with *śṛṅgāra* (love), the tarkan with *raudra* (anger), the korakkurunni with monkeys. The list of *rāgas* and their associations can be multiplied.

It will be clear from the above that the techniques of *vācikābhinaya* are varied, rich and multi-dimensional.

The *āngikābhinaya* of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, however, is the last word in the theatrical technique of the use of eyes and eyebrows, facial muscles, torso and hands. A full and elaborate vocabulary of movements is the essence of a Kuṭiyaṭṭam performance. Legendary stories have grown up around the consummate skill of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam actor and his ability to recreate situations and episodes powerfully through facial gestures and hands. Here also, as in the case of *vācikābhinaya,* there is a multiplicity of idiom and communication methodology as listed below:

(i) There are the purely abstract movements without meaning, which are seen in the caviṭṭu *kriyā* and in the other preliminaries.

(ii) There are then the dance sequences which constitute a part of the purappadu and have occasionally an element of pantomime. The basic position is the open spread out *grand plié* or *maṇḍalasthānam* of the lower limbs which is common to Kathākali and Kuṭiyaṭṭam. The *nṛtta* element is strong although not as elaborate as in Kathākali. Careful distinctions are made between different types of choreographical passages which occur in the *nṛtya kriya.* They are known by names like *ceriya cokkam* for entrance movements, *colliyunti naṭa* for graceful sedate movements etc.

(iii) There is also an interpretative movement related to the word recited or sung and which is general in character and pertains to the whole body. This is known as Cākiyaṭṭam (also coliyaṭṭam in Kathākali but different).

(iv) There is then the line-to-line, word-to-word and syllable-to-syllable interpretation through *hastābhinaya* and *netrābhinaya* (acting through the mediums of hands and eyes respectively), accompanied either with the recitation of the actor himself or with the song of the Nānyār. The *netrābhinaya*, particularly, is a highly intricate system of expression through the eyes.

(v) Since the Kuṭiyaṭṭam provides enough scope for improvisation and interpolation, there comes a stage when the recitative or sung word is used only as a take-off point for interpretative dancing which is highly contextual in character and requires a vast knowledge and deep understanding of the 'allusions'. The form, thus, is full of interpretative and pantomime movements, and the greatness of an actor lies in his capacity for multiple interpretation of the word.

(vi) The face and its muscles constitute another subgroup which is of the utmost importance in Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Techniques of expressing emotion through a controlled use of facial muscles have evolved in Kuṭiyaṭṭam to a degree unparalleled anywhere else. The Kathākali uses some of these techniques, but those of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam are more complex.

(vii) The micro-movements of the eyes (the *netrābhinaya*), through which the Kuṭiyaṭṭam actors often express complex situations or emotions, are a class by themselves.

It is impossible to describe the skill and artistry which is exhibited by a Cākyar through the use of his eyes, facial muscles and hands. This is the whole sphere of restrained *abhinaya* corresponding to Bharata's description of *antarbhinaya*. While the Kathākali has inherited a great part of this tradition and its rigorous training, the Kuṭiyaṭṭam has some special features and is perhaps more stylized and abstract.

The techniques of costuming and make-up used in the *āhāryābhinaya* reinforce this vision of presenting character and emotion impersonally and through a distinctive stylization. Although the *vidūṣaka* is real and contemporary, he too is not overportrayed realistically. A basic design is followed by characters with regard to the costuming which has some affinities with Kathākali but is quite distinct. No large oversize impression is created; in the Kuṭiyaṭṭam the costumes are designed to be viewed frontally.

Many influences can be discerned in the costume of the *vidūṣaka*, a class by itself, which comprises a thick and bulging lower garment and an *uttarīya* thrown over but kept rolled up at the back. The other characters also wear lover garments namely the *pṛṣṭha* and *paitakam* as well as tight upper garments called *kuppayam*. The women are dressed as in Kathākali. The make-up of Kuṭiyaṭṭam resembles that of Kathākali, but is somewhat simpler, although the basic colour symbolism is identical. The different types of make-up are the Pazhuppa of slightly reddish colour used for heroes, kings, and *dhirodātta* characters; the princes like Arjuna, Mitravasu and Rāma use pacce (green-śyām); the aborigines, *asuras*, and Śūrpaṇakhā use the *kari* (black); and characters like Rāvaṇa use the *katti* (literally, knife; i.e., basic red colour) with a pith-ball on the top of the nose as in Kathākali. The manner of applying the *cutti* (or lining with rice flour paste) is not markedly different from Kathākali. The ingredients used are identical and comprise turmeric powder, red arsenic, vermilion (*caliyam*), charcoal powder, Indian blue, rice powder (*abhra*), red Techchii flowers, Nonnana grass, bamboo sticks, cork and the outer covering of the arecanut, palm, etc. These indigenous items are also used in the make-up of characters of other forms, but in India Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Kathākali and Yakṣagāna have the most highly elaborate and stylized techniques of make-up and headgears.

With its external as well as internal elements, the Kuṭiyaṭṭam is at once a highly symbolic, abstract and self-conceived design (which some scholars have compared to a Vedic ritual) on the one hand and a very concrete form allowing for specificity, particularity and contemporaneity on the other. We observe also that while it has close connections with temple-ritual and court drama, it is not an exclusive art meant only for the select élite. It seeks to establish, and does establish, communication with the people, with both the initiated and the uninitiated. In this respect, it is typical of the Indian theatre arts, which are seldom, if ever, restricted to a particular class or caste of audience even though the actors or performers may represent a particular community or caste. The Kuṭiyaṭṭam incorporates into its acting styles many elements, some indigenous to Kerala, others (like the *āngikābhinaya*) derived from the Sanskrit tradition. The same amalgam is noticed in the use of language which ranges from Sanskrit to Maṇipravāla to colloquial Malayalam.

While some of its conventions (like aspects of the *Pūrvaraṅga*) belong to the

Sanskrit tradition, others like the *nirvāhaṇa* are its own distinctive features. It shares with the rest of the Indian theatre many features and stock conventions of the hero types, the *Gaṇeśa vandanā,* the *vidūṣaka,* etc.

Its presentation style borrows elements from all the arts and rests heavily on the literary word, the architectural design of the theatre, the sculptural motif, the painting motifs seen in mural painting, and the musical modes. Thus, it is a total theatre where all genres of the word (spoken or written), movement (macro and micro, abstract or interpretative), costume, make-up and design are woven together to constitute one integrated whole.

If we have dwelt on this form at some length, it is because its comprehensive techniques and skills provide a key to an understanding of the other forms we are going to describe now and which still survive in many parts of India.

III

YAKṢAGĀNA

Lying in the north of Kerala, on the west coast, Karnataka is flanked in the east by Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and in the north-east by Maharashtra. The territory comprising an area of 191,773 sq. km. is characterised by lush country, sloping western ghats and the sea. Its population of nearly thirty millions shares the rich history and cultural traditions of India, particularly of the southern States. Its artistic history in the literary, performing and the visual arts is closely linked with the political dynasties of the Kadambas, Rashtrakutas, Calukyas, Hoysalas and the Vijayanagara kings.

Although the form Yakṣagāna has been dated by some scholars as emerging in the 16th century and by others in the 18th century, its origins and growth can be traced back, as in the case of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, to Sanskrit literature and its theatre on the one hand, and Kannada literature and the many forms of ritual dancing and music prevalent in the area on the other. Like Kuṭiyaṭṭam, it carries forward many of the traditions and conventions of the Sanskrit theatre, particularly those of the *Pūrvaraṅga,* the *Vidūṣaka,* and the purposive denial of the unities of time and space. Also like Kuṭiyaṭṭam, it evolves its distinctive form in the use of recitative modes of poetry, melodies of music, rhythm, dance technique and above all, costuming and make-up. Unlike Kuṭiyaṭṭam, however, it departs in many significant ways from the conventions of the Sanskrit stage and does and contain a highly elaborate language of handgestures (*hastābhinaya*) and eye-gestures (*netrābhinaya*). It is also closely related to developments in literature in the adjoining states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and has some affinities to literary forms which flourished in the Maratha courts of Tanjore.

The literary and theatrical form called Yakṣagāna must be studied in relation primarily to Kannada literature and to the developments in the other arts, particularly music, painting and sculpture. Kannada literature is one of the oldest literatures of India, with an antiquity second only to Sanskrit, Prakrit and Tamil. A survey of the inscriptions of the State ranging from the 5th to the 18th centuries tells us of a varied and rich culture of the area, which was in constant interaction with other parts of India, as also possibly West Asia. The Halmidi lithic inscription of A.D. 450 is the earliest record of Kannada language. While there is no direct reference to the language prior to that date, a language akin to Kannada must have existed before it. Indirect references to Kannada, however, can be found in Tamil literature, dating back to the 2nd century. Cultural influences from

the North can be traced to the times of Aśoka judging from the rock edicts in the northern districts of Karnataka. Both Buddhism and Jainism were known to the region; the latter had an influence on Kannada literature and language. Sanskrit literature had travelled to Kannada early and the works of Māgha, Bhāravi, Bāṇa and Bhatta Nārāyaṇa were known along with the epics. Alongside were known works of Prakrit. Works such as *Bṛhatkathā* of Guṇāḍhya and *Gāthāsaptaśatī* of Hala have also influenced early Kannada writing. The influence of Jainism was deep and pervasive: the works of the teachers such as Bhūtabalī, Puṣpadanta, Vattakera, and Sāmantabhadra and others written in Sanskrit and Prakrit inspired Kannada poets over a long period. Thus into the making of old and medieval Kannada went many elements, some indigenous and purely regional, others which had travelled from other parts of India. The phases of Kannada literature, old, medieval and modern, all manifest this amalgam of what has been termed as the *Mārgī* and *Deśi* elements. Roughly, five periods of Kannada literature are identified by scholars: (i) the earliest one prior to A.D. 850, (ii) old Kannada with Jaina influence from A.D. 850 to A.D. 1150, (iii) the medieval from A.D. 1150 to A.D. 1500, (iv) post-medieval from A.D. 1500 to A.D. 1850, and (v) the modern era after A.D. 1850. Naturally, as in other parts of India the growth of this literature and expressions in the other arts were influenced by the successive waves of different religious movements like Jainism, Vīraśaivism, Brāhmanism, and particularly, Vaiṣṇavism and Bhakti.

Hardly anything of the literature of the period A.D. 450 to 850 has survived. However, from the work *Kavirājamārga* (A.D. 850) mainly a treatise on poetry, some valuable information can be gathered about literary styles, metrical forms etc., all of which have some relevance to the literary composition called the Yakṣagāna of a much later period.

The author of *Kavirājamārga* was followed by many others, the most important among whom is Asaga who is credited with the writing of eight works in Sanskrit and Kannada, including one entitled *Karṇāṭaka Kumārasaṁbhava*. Unfortunately, only a few verses of the two works *Śūdraka* and *Harivaṁśa* by the famous Guna Varma I are extant. Alas, there is scant direct evidence of these works although extracts are found in anthologies.

Poetic writing was suitably supplemented with prose works, the most important among them being *Vaddarabhane* (A.D. 925), which narrates the stories of nineteen Jaina ascetics who maintained their firmness of mind in the face of death. The narrative is racy, lively and spirited, and full of moral purpose. The presentation of the summary of the story in the beginning became a convention and perhaps influenced theatrical presentation considerably, at a later period. Many theatre forms in India follow this convention of presenting a brief summary at an initial stage.

While one could dwell on the beauties of these works and others, the purpose of drawing attention to these literary works in a study of Yakṣagāna is merely to point out that the structure and style of the contemporary Yakṣagāna incorporate many features which can be traced to old Kannada literature, to its thematic content, poetics, stylistic features and prose narrative forms. While, therefore, the Yakṣagāna as a literary composition is seemingly young when compared to a form like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam, within

it survive many elements which can be traced back to works which precede it by seven hundred years or more.

Of this early period, besides the two works mentioned above, there is the monumental and prolific writing of Pampā (A.D. 942). Although Pampā's father was a convert to Jainism, he was himself deeply immersed in Sanskrit and Prakrit literatures, specially the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. He was equally familiar with Jaina philosophy and hagiology and all branches of music, dance, drama, sculpture, painting and the crafts. This is amply borne out in his *Ādipurāṇa,* based on the story of Ādinātha or Pūrṇadeva, the first of the twenty-four Tirthankaras of Jainism. Although he adopts the theme from Jināsana II, he gives this piece a new literary and moral significance. In the section relating to the story of Lalitāṅga, he excels himself in portraying dramatically how the beautiful celestial dancer Nīlāñjanā dances her way to death, thereby preparing the mind of Ādinātha for renunciation. The work also throws significant light on the state of the arts during the reign of his patron Cālukyan prince Arikeśarī II who was a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta King—Kṛṣṇa III.

His second work *Pampā Bhārata* or *Vikramārjuna Vijaya* is equally significant, for it provides the model for considerable subsequent writing on the theme of the *Mahābhārata* in Karṇaṭaka. The hero of his work is Arjuna, but he is also Arikeśarī, his patron prince. The story thus moves smoothly and effectively on two levels; one, the universal story of the Pāṇdavas, and the other, the contemporary story of the Cālukyan prince. These conventions of multiple dimensions of time were thus well set by Pampā. Yakṣagāna to date follows some of the conventions. Between the 10th and 16th centuries there were many writers, poets and dramatists. Ponna and Ranna were contemporaries of Pampā and both made significant contributions to Kannada literature. For Ponna, Śāntinātha, the 18th Tiruthankara, was the hero; for Ranna, Rāmachandra. The heavy reliance on drama centering around biographies of heroes and mythological characters, so characteristic of Yakṣagāna, can be traced to these early beginnings. King Cāvundaray I (A.D. 978), a prose writer of significance, is the author of *Tri-ṣaṣṭi Lakṣaṇa Mahā Purāṇa,* a monumental work on Tirthankaras. He also wrote in Sanskrit. Nāgavarmā I (A.D. 990) wrote in the *campu* form a version of Bāṇa's *Kādambarī,* besides a work on prosody. Durgasimha rendered the *Pañcatantra* in prose and poetry in the 11th century. Śāntinātha (A.D. 1068) was the author of *Sukumāra carita,* which was based on the Jaina story of Sukumāra and Avantī and written in *campu* form. Nāgavarmācārya wrote a *Śataka* in A.D. 1070. Finally, there was Nāgacandra, the poet of *Pampā Rāmāyaṇa,* who called himself Abhinava Pampā. His version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is significant for the tragic heights to which he takes the character of Rāvaṇa.

Literary activity from A.D. 1150 to A.D. 1400 was impressive. While the old form like the *campu,* the *Śataka* (anthology of verses) and the prose narrative continued, other new forms were introduced. The innovations mainly took place through the reformist movement of the Vīraśaivas under the leadership of Basava who took up the spoken language of the people and gave it a literary status. The *vacana* was the most enduring of these forms. The content of many works continued to centre around the Jaina

Tirthankaras and those of the *Mahābhārata.* New and refreshing interpretations were, however, given to many characters of the epics, *Jātakas* and the Jaina Purāṇas. Scholars and theoreticians continued to write on prosody, grammar, mathematics, medicine, astrology, etc. This was followed by the writings of the *dāsa* poets of the Vaiṣṇava school, pioneered, according to some, by Sripada Ray (about 16th century).

The 15th and 16th centuries were interesting from many points of view. While writers like Kumāra Vyāsa were busy writing the Kannada *Bhārata* and versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *dāsa* poets provided a new devotional fervour. The poetry of the *dāsa* poets was closely linked to the developments in Telugu. The first Yakṣagāna, although in Telugu, was written in the 16th century by Peda Kempa Gaudan and was called *Gangā Gaurī Vilāsam* (A.D. 1513-1569). A resurgence followed in the 17th century and this was the time when the Yakṣagāna form developed in Karṇāṭaka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Andhra had known the form both as a sung narrative and as dance-drama since the 15th century. Significant literary activity followed throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; it was only natural that Kannada should have been in active interaction with it. The form was also related to the *Prabandha nāṭaka* of a slightly later period.

This brief literary survey will perhaps convince one of the literary sources from which the theatre artist (musician-dancer-dramatist) could draw. He was familiar with the themes of Jainism and Hinduism. The literary torms ranged from narrative epic to lyrical and pure prose and the compositional forms from the *campu* and *śataka* to the *vacana* and the *prabandha.* Besides, there was the lyric form of *śaṭpadī* and the *kirtana* or *pada* of the *dāsa* poets to draw upon. Musical forms were closely related to the literary compositions and more particularly to distinctive Kannada metres like *Ragale, Tripadā* and *Śaṭpadī.*

The composer of the Yakṣagāna in Kannada had thus only to look at the material from the Karṇāṭaka and adjoining regions to evolve a theatrical form which was deeply rooted in local and regional literary traditions. The Sanskrit tradition had already been assimilated into the regional literatures. Indeed, the controversy of *Mārgī* and *Deśī* had given rise to a distinct regional character both in content and form. This is amply borne out in the literary writing ranging from Basava to Purandaradāsa. Thus the theatrical form of Yakṣagāna must be considered a visual representation in the oral tradition of these literary developments. Critics have tried to label it as a purely folk drama, but a close analysis of the Yakṣagāna structure and the literature of Sanskrit and Kannada will reveal the unmistakable links between the two parallel streams of literature, written and oral. Scholars are of the view that the first drama in Kannada, *Mitra-Vinda-Govinda* (based on Śrī Harṣa's *Ratnāvali*), was written in the 17th century. This may be true, but it must not be forgotten that the dramatic narrative form was old in Kannada.

Soon thereafter, the literary activity appeared to wane and the Yakṣagāna as a theatrical form regained popularity only in the 18th century. Written plays continued to be created but mainly as scripts for presentation. It must also be remembered that the Yakṣagāna emerged as a full-fleged form in South Kanara at a time of great political

unrest and social disturbances. Sadāṣiva Nāyaka (A.D. 1544-1565) had ruled the territory generally called Tulu Rajya in the face of Portuguese and other threats. The reign of his successors, namely Venkatappā Nāyaka and Vīrabhadra Nāyaka (A.D. 1629-1641), specially the reign of the latter, was full of troubles in the kingdom. The political struggles continued well through a major part of the 18th century also, until the British finally entered the region around A.D. 1768. The part played by Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan is too well known to need recounting.

If we have referred briefly to this political history of the time, it is merely to stress the fact that many theatrical forms have grown up in India precisely at a period of political conflict and social unrest, more as an answer to the contemporary situation than as an other-worldly pre-occupation with a dead past. Understandably, while the vital links with the traditions of great architecture, sculpture and painting were broken, strong links of mass-contact were forged through drama at a time when people's emotional security was seriously threatened. The theatre sustained them, as they were sustained by their dedication and commitment to the schools of philosophy such as the Dvaita school of Madhvācārya, the religio-social movements like Vīraśaivism and finally Bhakti movement. Along with the age-old ritual, the religious activity continued on both popular and sophisticated levels. On the popular level, the Nāga (snake) worship in the form of *Nāga-maṇḍalas* (a serpentine design) and spirit worship (i.e. to the *Bhūtas*) are particular to the region and have great antiquity. Every village in the district has its own *Bhūtasthānas,* the origins of which can be traced to pre-historic times.

While apparently the Yakṣagāna has little or nothing to do with these ritual practices, it cannot be said to be totally unconnected with them. It is useful to bear in mind that this form is only one of the several ritual practices and secular traditions of theatre, dance and drama, which have continued to flourish in the region from very early times. It is not easy to clearly demarcate the areas of each of these diverse practices in terms of tribal, village and urban societies or court and temple milieus. Nor can one assert that certain forms were the sole prerogative of particular castes like the Brāhmiṇs and Kṣtriyas or village communities like the "Scheduled" classes of today. A comprehensive survey of all these forms at the tribal, village and urban levels in terms of groups and socio-economic stratification has yet to be attempted. Suffice it to say that before the Yakṣagāna could gain universal recognition as a fully developed dance-drama, there co-existed many other forms of ritual worship such as the *Nāga-maṇḍala* and *Bhūta* worship, or the dances of tribes like the Kurubis, Marati Kudiyas and others. Socially, functional or occupational groups like the Dodabas and the Natavas enjoy an important status on account of the prominent part they play in the ritual dances.

Reverting to the Yakṣagāna, however, we find that its history can be reconstructed from the internal evidence of many of the literary works mentioned above. We have referred to these works so far only in the context of the evolution of Yakṣagāna as a literary genre, but they are interesting and valuable also as source material for evidence relating to other dramatic theatrical forms.

According to some scholars, the description of a dramatic performance of the

Rāmāyaṇa in the *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa* as a ruse to slay Vajranābhāsura is the first reference to the Yaksagana. The Bhāgavatamelā mentioned therein may be a close parallel to the operatic drama form. It would, however, not be correct to conclude that the *Harivaṁśa* playlet and Yakṣagāna have any direct relationship. In inscriptional records and chronicles, much evidence is found of the general prevalence of dance-drama, the distinction practiced between pure dance (*nṛtya*) and drama (*nātya*), and the evolution of musical styles (*saṅgīta*). Inscriptions at Paṭṭaḍakal tells us of a Naṭasevya of the 8th century who was master of both acting and dancing. Both the words *Nartaka* and *Naṭa* are used. The Mugud inscription (close to Dharwar, dated A.D. 1045) refers to the Nāṭakaśālā. However, the first conclusive and precise reference to the Yakṣagāna is found only in the 12th century work *Candraprabhā Purāṇa.* The *Mallināthа Purāṇa,* written a few years later, also refers to it. In the 16th century, Kavi Ratanākara Varṇī speaks of it in his *Bhārateśa-Vaibhava.*

It is also mentioned in the *Saṅgīta sudhā* (A.D. 1628) of Govinda Dīkṣita. It would appear from all these accounts that the Yakṣagāna was first a sung narrative and then a perfected style of music by the 17th century. Later, the theatrical form took over the name from the musical style. To the specific references to Yakṣagāna must be added the innumerable references to dance, drama and music which we find in all the Kannada works mentioned above.

It would appear as natural that in order to understand the full background of this form we have to take into consideration the historical development of India in general and that of Karṇāṭaka in particular. There was a parallel growth of several artistic forms at different levels of society; literary and musical styles pertaining both in the Sanskrit (*Mārgī*) tradition and the regional (*Deśī*) forms. The two continued to evolve together.

The textual sanction of the Yakṣagāna is chiefly derived from a 17th century work called the *Sabhā Lakṣaṇa maṭṭu prasaṅga.* Writers of Yakṣagāna in Karṇāṭaka as distinct from those who wrote Yakṣagāna plays in Telugu and Tamil were many and they continue until the 20th century. Of these, Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇa alias Muddana Santibana Desikar, Parti Subha and Timna may be mentioned. All of them may be considered writers of scripts of plays designed for the stage rather than pure literary drama. However, their creativity must be seen against the literary activity outlined above because this so-called folk dance (appellation used by most literary critics) was a significant facet of the larger cultural developments.

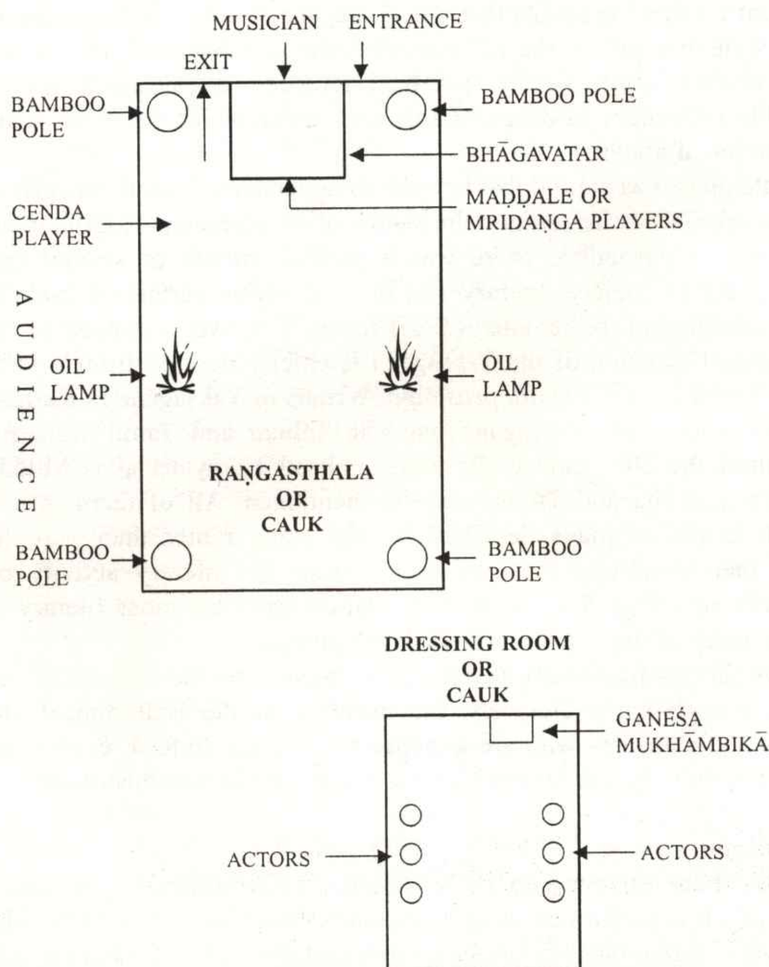
It is within this framework that we must understand the Yakṣagāna of today, which is chiefly, though not exclusively, the preserve of the Brāhminical class called the Bhāgavatars, Bhāgavatas who are attached to temples. Indeed, even today the form is maintained mainly by the Devasthānams or the temple administration.

The Performance

Although there are references to the Nāṭakaśālā or Nartakaśālā in inscriptions and literary records, today it is performed in open air, unlike the Kuṭiyaṭṭam of Kerala. Also, unlike Kathākali, it is sometimes performed on a raised platform. Kathākali is performed in the

open but at the same ground level as the audience. The stage is either rectangular or square—sixteen feet by twenty feet or a square with each side having a length of sixteen or twenty feet. A pole is erected at each of the four corners with banana trunks and leaves tied to them. Two oil lamps are placed on the side midstage. At the back centre stage sits the Bhāgavatar, the chief director, reciter and conductor of the play, holding cymbals and accompanied by a drum player (*maḍḍale*) and a *śruti* player. Today a harmonium player and occasionally a pipe player are also visible on the stage. At a distance to their right sits the *cenda* player. The audience sits on all three sides. There are vast open spaces at the back shrouded in darkness to provide for quick exits and entrances. The stage looks somewhat like this:

At a distance is a thatched hut which constitutes the green room where actors sit on the ground in parallel rows and facing an image of Gaṇeśa which they worship before emerging into the acting area. Sometimes it is an image or icon of Mukhāmbikā and not



Gaṇeśa. The plays are presented after the harvest is over, from November to May, when there is not a day when the Yakṣagāna drums are not heard in the lush country-side of Kanara.

The *cende* sounds, the *maḍḍale* beats, and the Bhāgavatar begins to sing. The prologue or the preliminaries of the play are reminiscent of what we have noticed in the Kuṭiyaṭṭam but are not identical. Here the *pūrvaraṅga* is known as the *sabhālakṣaṇa* and constitutes three distinct parts. First, the invocation to Gaṇeśa or Mukhāmbikā in the green room, followed by the Bhāgavatar singing a *śloka* on the stage and a dialogue of the *Vidūṣaka* called Hanumanāyaka with his retinue of young boys called Kodaṅgi. In the second phase there is a dialogue between Hanumanāyaka and the Bhāgavatar. Finally, in the third phase, the Bhāgavata again sings a *śloka* and two young dancers, Bāla-Gopāla and Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma, enter and present a pure dance sequence. Often two female characters (*strī-veśa*) representing Satyabhāmā and Rukmiṇī perform a *lāsya* sequence. This performance is also pure dance (*nṛtta*) and there is enough evidence, in both the dances of the Bāla-Gopāla as also of the *Strī-veśa*, of the rich dance technique of the form.

The ritualistic practices of Kuṭiyaṭṭam are no longer in evidence here, although *pūrvaraṅga* is fairly elaborate and rigorously structured. There is an open-air character which makes it different from a ritual worship. After the preliminaries are over, the Bhāgavatar or Bhāgavata begins to recite verses from the main drama of the evening called the *prasaṅga*. Each character is introduced through the singing of the Bhāgavatar. The entry of the character is announced by an actor who remains hidden behind a curtain held by two persons. The singing of the Bhāgavatar and the performance of the actor-dancer behind the stage is analogous to the *purappadu* of Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali and, to a very simplified extent, of the *nirvāhaṇa* of Kuṭiyaṭṭam. While there are no flash backs to previous births, there is a vast array of epithets and synonyms of a character, the *slokas* describing his chief characteristics, his prowess, heroism and the rest. This part is called the *oḍḍolaga*. Each actor, from behind the curtain, bows to the ground and performs a particular *nṛtta* sequence, showing his back to the audience, sometimes revealing just the gorgeous head-dress, and then disappears. In a sequence of the Five Pāṇdavas, for example, each brother enters singly first and before departing, does his part to the singing of the Bhāgavatar and the utterance of mnemonic syllables of the pure dance portions each ending in a triplet called *muktāya*. Then all five reappear together, though behind the curtain, but the width of the curtain is often shortened by their drawing it downwards to the waist level and holding it diagonally and horizontally, till suddenly the curtain is pulled away by the two stage hands. The actors stand in full view of the audience with their colourful costumes and resplendent headgears, all seen in the light of the two oil lamps on the side. The *oḍḍolaga* or description of each character is such that it clearly distinguishes him from the other characters of the play and thus sets the tone of the play. While the good character dances and takes turns, the demon roars and shrieks, displays grotesque gestures, including as in some contemporary performance, details of gestures resembling the brushing of teeth, etc.

The *prasaṅga* or story is presented through the recitation of the Bhāgavàtar or Bhāgavata who sings the verse passages as also the dialogues in prose between him and an actor or amongst the actor. Usually, *āngikābhinaya* of the most descriptive and simple type is performed to the singing of the verses. There are no elaborate hand gestures, and yet those that are there are sufficient to give the form a distinct stylization. The *nṛtta* portions are performed to the beating of the *cende* and the *maḍḍale* and are interspersed with recitative and song passages. The mnemonics are peculiar to Yakṣagāna although they have vague affinities to patterns of foot-work seen in some other dance styles of the South, such as Bharatanāṭyam, Bhāgavatamelā and Bhāmakalāpam.

The dance technique constitutes a basic stance akin to a "demi plié" (or *ardhamaṇḍalī*) but it is not an imperative as in Bharatanāṭyam or Bhāgavatamelā. Nevertheless, there are innumerable types of gaits, modes of walking, standing and sitting which account for a very definite stylization. There are gaits of birds and animals which are also very effectively used. Besides the *ardhamaṇḍalī,* a slightly squatting position with out-turned thighs and knees, there is also the open ground 'plié' position as seen in some sequences. The gaits and the stylized entries are reminiscent of the *caris* and *gatis* of *Nāṭyaśāstra.* The stances are the *maṇḍalas* and *sthānas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra.* High jumps, pirouettes and a particular type of pirouetting on the knees called *maṇḍi* (akin to the *jānūbhayam* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*) are seen in many *prasaṅgas*. This *maṇḍī* (or *manḍali*) or pirouetting on knees is also seen in the *Rāsa* dances of Manipur and Vrindavan. The weight of the body is held on one foot, as is common in many other dance-styles of India. Choreographical patterns of figures of eight, square and half-circles abound. The actor-dancer and the Bhāgavatar have full freedom to improvise both in the *nṛtta* as well as the *abhinaya* portions.

In the singing and recitative passges various metres are used. There is the Sanskrit metre *Ārya* which helps to speed up the pace of the narrative: the *nṛtta* is used when deities are praised. The typical Kannada metres such as *Dvipadī, Bhāminī, Śaṭpadī* are used for narrative purpose and interlinking. Six basic *tālas* are used: *Ek* with 4 beats, *Jhāmpa* with 5, *Rūpaka* with 6, *Triputa* with 7, *Ādi* with 8, and *Āṣṭa* with 14. There is enough scope for symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns to be woven on these. The mnemonics have strong accented sounds and end in triplets.

The metrical patterns, the rhythm and tempo provide the base for different movements of the dance, ranging from the lyrical to the heroic and ferocious. Very distinct clusters of movements have emerged as a result of the interweaving of these elements. The romantic sequences use one kind of rhythmic and metrical patterns. The war scenes use a different type and are particularly intricate and impressive. They are a close parallel to those used in the Kathākali.

The musical content is equally rich. Karnataka received and developed the musical streams of Hindustani and Karnataka systems. The Yakṣagāna manifests this amply. It is said that nearly one hundred and fifty *ragas* are employed in the Yakṣagāna repertoire. Dr Shivaram Karanth has rendered invaluable service by not only reviving the repertoire of Yakṣagāna but also by reconstructing many *ragas*. He has been able to collect as many

as sixty *ragas* which seem to be a harmonious blend of the three different streams of Karnatak, Hindustani and purely Kannada music. Amongst these are, *Macali* or *Gopanite* which are purely Kannada. Others like the *Korvai* are akin to the *Kuranvanji* of Karnataka and yet others like *Dviljavanti* are variations of the *Jaijaivanti* of Hindustani music. *Yaman Kalyāṇa, Toḍi, Kedāra Gauri, Ānanda Bhairavī, Śankarābharaṇam* and *Kalyāṇī* are common and popular Hindustani and Karnataka *ragas*.

The repertoire of Yakṣagāna consists of nearly sixty plays, all based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It is interesting to note that the Jaina content seems to have totally disappeared. Here again, Dr Karnath has been able to lay his hands on many manuscripts, all belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries, which could further enrich the repertoire of Yakṣagāna. The themes of the two epics with their particular Kannada flavour constitute the basic framework on which the dramatic spectacle is built.

An analysis of the literary structure of these plays clearly shows how the Yakṣagāna author was utilizing all the literary styles and modes which poets and authors had evolved in the preceding centuries. Although the *campu* has become extinct, the *vacana* form is frequently used. The connections with the *prabandha* form are unmistakable.

Like Kuṭiyaṭṭam, though less stylized, Yakṣagāna follows a structure of pure rhythm, recitation, singing verse passages and dialogues in prose, all interspersed with pure dancing or *nṛtta* and set to well-known metres, rhythmic compositions and *ragas*.

A particular form of Yakṣagāna prevalent today is known as the Yakṣagāna Bāyalāṭā, taking its name from a form of musical composition and denoting open-air drama.

And finally, there is the most spectacular part of Yakṣagāna: its make-up, costume, headgears etc., which transform the actors into other-wordly characters, creating illusion of the heaven and the nether world. Like Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali, Yakṣagāna also divides its characters into a few types. There are, first the hero-types akin to *Dhīrodātta* characters of Sanskrit drama: Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Rāma, Arjuna and Karṇa belong to this variety. The second type consists of characters like Indra or Gaya (Gāṅdharva) or Bhīma in his ferocious *raudra* mood. The third includes types like the hunters, aborigines etc. (e.g. the character of Kirāta). There are then the demons like Rāvaṇa and Kumbhkarṇa who, although heroic and brave, are destructive and evil. Another category consists of characters like Rāvaṇa's brother Vibhīṣaṇa or Rāvaṇa's son Atikāya. Their costuming and make-up are quite different from any others. There are then the special types like Vīrabhadra and Narasiṁha who are incarnations of Viṣṇu or those aspects of gods which take form to destroy evil. Besides these heroes and anti-heroes there are characters like Hanumān, Bālī, Jambuvān, etc. who have a special make-up and headgear. There are finally characters like *ṛṣis* or *gurus* analogous to the *minnakku* of Kathākali. In the female roles, there is no attempt at stylization and they are presented more or less realistically.

Although in the matter of make-up India has many traditions, both Kathākali and Yakṣagāna have the most highly evolved techniques with a system of colour symbolism which demands further study and analysis.

The costume and make-up of Yakṣagāna present many problems. Many historians consider this make-up and headgear to be the results of some developments which took place in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, if one looks carefully at sculptures in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, belonging to the period from the 13th to 17th centuries, one is struck by the fact that many characters, specially the *Dvārapālas* and other heroes, are seen in headgears which have a strong resemblance to the present Yakṣagāna type. Many features of the costuming and the headgear of the contemporary Yakṣagāna appear to be continuing from the 13th century onwards.

Judging from this sculptural evidence which comes from all the three regions it would seem that a theatrical form which used these headgears and ornaments was known to many parts of South India. However, in the absence of any literary and textual support of this sculptural evidence, no conclusive statements can be made. Indeed, the make-up, the costuming and ornaments of these many forms of theatre require much greater exploration than has been hitherto attempted.

The make-up of the contemporary Yakṣagāna follows the same principles as Kathākali. However, the similarity is only superficial because on closer observation it becomes clear that contrary to the view held by some, Yakṣagāna has evolved its distinctive make-up techniques which are by no means an imitation of Kathākali.

The principles of using make-up to transform the individual face to a character type are common to many forms of Asian theatre. The Japanese Kabuki and Chinese Opera, among many others, follow these principles. In India, besides Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Kathākali and Yakṣagāna, there are other ritual and cult dances where there is a deliberate attempt to achieve dissimilitude with life. The Bhagavatī cult dances, the Teyaṭṭam and Teriyaṭṭam of Kerala and many others in Tulu country adopt elaborate make-up techniques. Compared to these, the make-up of the Kathākali, Kṛṣṇāṭṭam and Yakṣagāna is both simpler and more sophisticated.

In Yakṣagāna the face is first covered with a basic make-up on which are drawn lines in different colours, particularly red, black and white. In Kathākali the basic colour for heroes in their moods of heroism, valour and fierceness is green (*Pacca*) while in Yakṣagāna it is a pink-yellow. The cheek-bones, cheeks and the chin are first covered with a basic layer of pink made up by mixing coconut oil, water, rice paste and lime. On this, different designs are drawn to represent different characteristics or moods of the character. For young princes like Nakula or Sahadeva, a large white portion is drawn near the eyes with an inner area of white and an enclosing life of red. The forehead has a large *tilaka* of red, white and black: the design of the *tilaka* varies from character to character and many a time it is this which helps the audience to identify a particular character. The eyes and eyebrows are enlarged with *Kappu* (collyrium) but the contours are quite different from those seen in Kathākali or Kṛṣṇāṭṭam. Lips are naturally coloured red with a paste called *Kempu*. This simple scheme without moustaches is followed for characters like Bāla-Gopāla, Lava-Kuśa, Kṛṣṇa, Abhimanyu, etc. For heroic characters like Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, etc., black moustaches are painted along with a white or black paint on the chin to suggest a beard. The same is also followed for Karṇa and other characters. Many

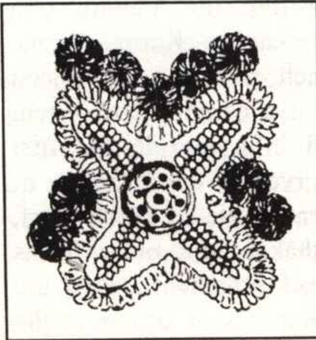
Yudhiṣṭhira, etc., black moustaches are painted along with a white or black paint on the chin to suggest a beard. The same is also followed for Karṇa and other characters. Many variations are possible within this basic design: some characters wear moustaches and no beards; others wear both. The impression created is that of a flattened square face. Characters like Bhīma in their fierce mood not only have a painted beard and moustaches, but these are superimposed by woolen moustaches and cut out beards. The design of the *tilaka* on the forehead is also quite different and often it may cover the bridge of the nose. A small red design is added under the white portion near the eyes just above the cheek-bones on either side to suggest valour and fierceness. The elderly characters like Daśaratha and Dhṛtarāṣṭra wear white painted moustaches and false white woolen moustaches and a beard instead of black paint on the chin as in the case of characters like Arjuna.

Other characters like the Gandharvas have a special make-up where an oval outline in red is drawn around each eye and there is a design in white within the oval pattern.

The colour of the basic make-up changes in the case of Rākṣasas: now it is red and green. Kathākali also follows the symbolism of red denoting evil and heroism. In Yakṣagāna a combination of red and green or blue represents Rākṣasas in their moods of valour and fierceness and red and black in their moods of fierceness and evil. A characteristic make-up of an Ardharākṣasa or Atikāya comprises a deep green basic make-up on the cheeks and cheek-bones and bright red make-up on the jaws and chin. The upper and lower eyelids and the area around the eyes are coloured deep red. A line of black is clearly drawn along the eyelashes. The eyebrows are thickened and enlarged. The basic make-up on the forehead is green or blue and just above each eyebrow on the forehead are drawn small circles in red with a white outline made up of dots. The *tilaka* of red and white lines comes down to the tip of the nose. All these when put together—the red and the blue combination, the use of an overlayered red and white with particular design and the large square moustaches—gives a fearsome impression.

Other characters such as Śūrpaṇakhā, Vālī and Bhulaka rājā have a make-up which is intricate and effective. Indeed, the Yakṣagāna uses at least eight to ten categories of make-up, which is much more than what Kathākali does.

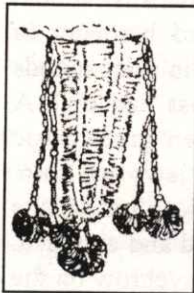
The variety of make-up is appropriately supplemented with an equally impressive variety in other aspects of *āhārya* (costuming, etc.) such as headgears, jewellery, costumes and the like. Character types are carefully categorized through the different types of headgears, costumes and jewellery.



The basic costume of most characters is simple: it comprises a loose or fitting black pyjama. All characters except *ṛṣis* and women wear this. Over the pyjama or tights is draped a typical Karṇāṭaka large checked *sārī* with red and yellow. The draping of the *sārī* is such that it allows for a maximum movement of the legs in extensions, elevations,



jumps and pirouettes. The basic upper garment is a long-sleeved jacket of red, green or black depending upon the character who is being portrayed. The mood of the character and his dominant character traits are suggested through different colours. The jackets are not open at the back, a feature so characteristic of Kathākali. Also, except for the character of Vālī or Hanumāan, the jackets are not fluffy as in the Kathākali. A sash or belt is tied on the waist over the *sārī* the Kathākali there are no flowing scarves (*uttarīya*) with tassels and hidden mirrors. Over these jackets and the lower *dhotī* are worn a large number of breast plates, shoulder ornaments, girdles and belts, all made of a very light wood brilliantly coloured in gold, red, etc., with insets of mirrors. The Bāla-Gopālas wear breast plates on their jackets of the simplest kind. The heroes and anti-heroes wear heavier breast plates with a characteristic shape of a four pointed star. (see illustration pre page).



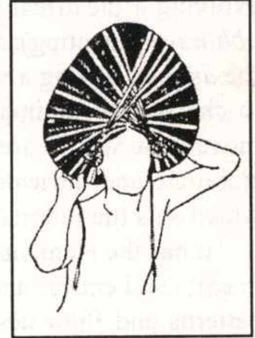
The breast plates of Rākṣasas and the demons are two pieces and cover the whole chest and abdomen and are surrounded by round woolen tassels on all sides. (see illustration at right). From the waist-band hangs a front flat flap with many cords and strings. (see illustration at left). The shoulder plates have a greater variety in the Yakṣagāna. Heroes like Bhiṣma, Dharmarājā, etc. wear shoulder plates with multiple conical knobs. The Rākṣasas wear shoulder plates almost like an armour but the effect of these plates as of the others, is to enlarge the dimensions of the character. Armlets are tied on the upper arms, where the shoulder plate ends. On the forearm are worn many types of bangles, wrist bands, etc. Naturally, there are the usual wooden ear-rings which cover the whole ear and choker types of necklaces, etc. All in all, this is a brilliant rich attire and the shape, size and inner design of each of these distinguishes one character from the other.

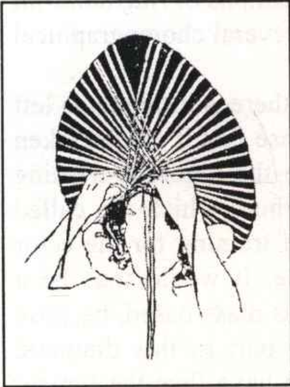
The most spectacular aspect which makes this costuming, jewellery and make-up theatrically most effective is the headgear or the *mundāsu* and *mundale* (literally meaning turbans). Kathākali as we know has many types of *mundis* but they are all crowns or headgears (*Kirīṭam* and *Keśabhāraṇas*) which are worn by the actor like caps or hats. In the Yakṣagāna, while some characters like the Vānara rāja Hanumanta, Rākṣasas, etc. wear these, the heroes, the Gandharvas, Karṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Bāla-Gopāla, etc. tie a turban with an elaborate process, which gives the impression of a crown or a worn headgear but is in fact a turban. There is a complicated system of wrapping the turban. Most dancers have long hair tied in a bun in the first instance. This bun on one side or at the back of the head serves as the mainstay or anchor for the entire head-dress. Over the bun and on the head is tied a black scarf, a feature of costuming which the Yakṣagāna and the Kathākali and other forms using heavy headgears share. First, the actor ties a forehead ornament called the *bottu munḍale,* which is a basic centre piece tied to the forehead with strings at the



back. The actor then either wears the made-up crown called the *munḍāsu* (or *Kirīṭa*) and ties the *Kedage munḍale* or the turban.

One type of *munḍāsu* is a *gopuram* shaped turban made up by tying thick cotton rope in concentric circles. Yards after yards of this thick cotton rope are placed dexterously so as to create the effect of a small or big crescent or a half circle. The initial structure thus looks like a tall turban. (see illustration at left). However, all this is then covered with a black cloth, a time-consuming turban tied each time before the performance. Over the black cloth are then tied narrow pieces of ribbon or tinsel like radii from the centre of the forehead (see illustration at right). This part of the headgearing is again an elaborate long process, and each actor learns the skill of wrapping his *munḍale* after years of practice. While Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, etc., wear medium size *munḍāsu,* Karṇa, Śalya, Pradyumna, etc. wear large over-size *munḍāsu,* which are as difficult to tie as they are impressive. The shape, size and designs of these headgears, whether of the *Kirīṭa* type (i.e. crowns) or those that are tied like a turban, are vast and intricate, and are used as clearly distinctive features of the characters (see illustration at left).





Characters like Śūrpaṇakhā, Hanumān and Garuḍa and others of a special kind wear headgears which are unique to each of them. Female characters, *ṛṣis,* etc., wear naturalistic make-up and simple headgears. In this respect they are a counter part of the *minnakku* characters of the Kathākali. The Yakṣagāna has indeed perfected a system of stylized costuming, make-up and headgears which makes it a class apart. A fuller discussion of this very important aspect of the Yakṣagāna demands an almost independent study. Dr K.S. Karanth has given some account of it.

Nevertheless, even this brief description will prove conclusively that this seemingly simple folk-theatre is a highly evolved form, which follows many intricate and complex methods of costuming, headgears and make-up. Also the affinities with and differences from the Kathākali are obvious. The basic male make-up differs from the Kathākali is so far as the good characters here adopt a pink-yellow base rather than the green *pacca* of the Kathākali. Also, no moustaches are used in Kathākali, instead, the jaws are enlarged with paper cuts. Here moustaches and painted beards are used. The red is identically used for fierce *raudra* characters and so is the black used for Kirātas (hunters) and the rest. Compared to Kathākali,

Although Bharata refers to these techniques in one of his chapters, where we learn that faces were painted and that a colour symbolism was followed, no authoritative text has yet been discovered in regional languages. These make-up techniques also call for the comparative study of the colour symbolism as described in the Puraṇas and similar texts from China and Japan, particularly those concerning the Chinese Opera and the Japanese Kabuki.

Yakṣagāna, like Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali, follows the *Nāṭyaśāstra* tradition by evolving a theatrical technique which is a harmonious balance among the four types of *abhinaya* (enacting): the *vācika,* with the recitative, sung verse and pure prose passages; the *āṇgika,* having a well-formulated system of stylized gaits (*gatis*) classified according to character or animal, bird or human situation and mood, and patterns and clusters of movement which are set to seven metrical cycles of the *tālas;* the *āhārya,* with its elaborate and intricate costuming, headgear and make-up conventions; and the *sāttvika,* which sets the internal mood pervading the moral and ethical tone of the dramatic piece.

It has the elements of *Tāṇḍava* and *Lāsya* and follow the conventions of *Nāṭyadharmī* in exits and entries and in the establishment of locale through its several choreographical patterns and floor designs.

After one has examined these structural and stylized features, there is little that is left in the Yakṣagāna which can be considered as pure folk, in the sense that it can be taken as untutored, unlearned and spontaneous. True, it does not have the vigorous training system involving body technique of a Kuṭiyaṭṭam or Kathākali, both which are called highly classical forms; but it nevertheless demands long years of training for the actor on the stage and the Bhāgavatar who conducts the performance. It would thus be a misnomer to call this form merely "folk" or popular. However, it is mass-based, because audiences of twenty thousand and more watch and take active part in this dramatic spectacle. In this sense, it is both popular and village based. We have thus the typical Indian phenomenon of an artistic form containing all elements of classicity while being perfectly situated in the socio-cultural milieu of a village. The oral traditions, the mobility of the Bhāgavatar and the enthusiasm of village population have been responsible for sustaining the form in spite of lack of patronage or a set institutional frame-work

Finally then, Yakṣagāna like Kuṭiyaṭṭam communicates with its audience on two planes: one involving the past and eternal themes of the epics and the Purāṇas, and the other with its contemporary social satire through portrayals of characters like Hanumanāyaka and the Kodāṅgi. We have already mentioned the points of contact among Yakṣagāna, Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali. We shall see its close affinities with other forms in the adjoining states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu when we consider the Bhāgavatamelā and the Bhāmakalāpam. Its interconnections with other ritual, folk and tribal forms have also been indicated though there is need for a deeper study of this last aspect. The connection between the Yakṣagāna and the marionette theatre form called Gombeyaṭṭa is, however, the closest. The marionettes follow closely the human theatre in all details of costuming, make-up, literary composition and accompanying music. They are rounded three-dimensional figures with limbs which can be articulated at the

shoulder, elbows, hips and the knees. In short, they follow all the movement patterns of the human Yakṣagāna. A second close parallel is difficult to find, even in the entire Indian tradition.

As a theatrical form, the Yakṣagāna has only recently received attention of scholars and artists. Its history is known and its connections with forms inside Karnataka and from other parts of India are also unmistakable. But it is a vast subject remaining unexplored. It is hoped that the points suggested here will serve as the beginning of such a rounded study.

IV

BHĀGAVATAMELĀ AND KUCIPUḌI

In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are prevalent many dance-drama forms which are called by varying names—Bhāgavatamelā, Kucipuḍi, Bhāmakalāpam, Yakṣagāna, etc. Others, such as Veethināṭakam of Andhra Pradesh and Terukoothu of Tamil Nadu are today called the street theatre forms. Besides, there are the several Kurvañji forms. The list of forms and genres could be enlarged.

While it is possible to treat each of these separately, as each has a distinctive character, there are many overlapping areas of theme and content which make them members of a large family.

All these belong to the generic literary form called the Yakṣagāna which emerged in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Yakṣagāna has also to be seen against a broader framework of developments in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Historically, they were closely interwoven and many different types of dance-drama traditions appear to stem from the same literary source. While in Karṇāṭaka it took a very definite shape in the 17th century, Bhāgavatamelā of Melattur in Tanjore district, Tamil Nadu, and what is called by the generic name Kucipuḍi in Andhra, are closely related.

Popular street theatre forms of the 17th and 18th centuries which became the sole preserve of the economically under-previleged groups, such as Veethināṭakam and Terukoothu, are today rural in character and are performed largely by non-brahmanical sections of society or even particular tribes. A look at the inner structure of both these genres reveals that they follow the literary models of the generic form of the Yakṣagāna or Bhāgavatamelā mentioned above. We cannot thus classify these forms into neat categories of the literary, traditional and urban on the one hand and folk or tribal or rural on the other. These forms, alongwith the several types of Kurvañji known to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, illustrate excellently our hypothesis that there were two parallel movements in the cultural pattern. One was a vertical oblong movement within a region where although certain artistic manifestations were exclusive to certain levels or sections of society, there was both an upward and downward mobility. And the other was a horizontal movement where artistic genres at analogous levels of society were in constant interaction with each other in different regions particularly contiguous areas.

We may roughly describe the phenomenon in the context of dance and dance-drama as follows in the geographical region of the southern zone.

		Andhra Pradesh	*Tamil Nadu*	*Karnataka*	*Kerala*
1.	Temple	Devadāsīaṭṭam	Sādirnṛtya	Dance of Devadāsī (Mysore style)	Aṣṭapadī singing in the sanctum
2.	Temple court-yard	Yakṣagāna Bhāmakalā-pam	Yakṣagāna Bhāgavata-melā	Yakṣagāna	Kuṭiyaṭṭam Kṛṣṇāṭṭam Kathākali
3.	Temple & village milieu	Kurvañji	Kurvañji	—	—
4.	Street forms	Veethināṭakam	Terukoothu	—	Ottānthullāl
5.	Community dance	Kummi	Kummi	—	Kaikoṭṭikali, Kummi
6.	Tribal forms	Māthurīs, etc.	Karagam	Several forms	
7.	Ritual Dances	—	Kāvādi	Nāgamaṇḍala Bhūtam, Kolams, etc.	Several forms including Pulayārkali, Theyyam, Kolams, etc.

While Nos. 1-6 of each region share some features, either of the literary word or human movement or musical modes, there is a close affinity of literary content among all the forms in the first category and even more so among those of the second category. Another type of division between pure dance and dance-drama forms can be made and the differences and common features identified. Our concern here is with the category two above in so far as it relates to Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. We have already seen the connections among Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Kathākali and Yakṣagāna. The first stands in a category by itself, although closely related to both ritual dancing and to dance-drama of the temple courtyard.

The first striking feature of all the forms in the second category is their literary base. Indeed, theatre-historians have by and large neglected this fundamental fact relating to these theatrical forms while considering their pure dramatic form and technique. The forms emerged out of literary creations and their theatrical spectacle continues to be guided by Sanskrit, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu literatures. Also, many of the structural features of contemporary theatrical spectacle can be traced to literary content, form and style which belongs to an epoch which antedates the actual writing of the literary compositions known either by the generic name Yakṣagāna or the particular theatrical form Bhāgavatamelā or Bhāmakalāpam.

It would, therefore, only be pertinent to present a bird's-eye view of developments in Tamil and Telugu literatures before considering the contemporary forms, either the Bhāgavatamelā forms or the street theatre forms like Veethināṭakam or Ṭerukoothu.

Attention has already been drawn to the antiquity of Tamil Nadu and its deep impact on the growth of Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada. The *Śilappadikaram* and the *Maṇimekhalāi* were common heritage of the entire region and continued to influence writers, poets and dramatists not only in the formative years but also all through the medieval period. As in Kerala, so also in Tamil Nadu, we begin to see signs of dynamic interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil very early. Indeed, the first grammar of Tamil, viz., the *Tolkāppiyam,* bears this out significantly. As a consequence, a language which was an admixture of Tamil and Sanskrit evolved. The Tamilians like the Keralites also called it *Maṇipravāla.* Thus, alongside the growth and development of Sangam literature and the mystical outpourings of the Śaiva Nāyanmārs and the Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs, there was a parallel stream where Tamil was being enriched through translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature.

The admixture of Tamil and Sanskrit, and later, of Pali and Prakrit in its language provides also an example of how Tamil Nadu could assimilate the diverse influences of Buddhism and Jainism. A parallel development was the beginning of the deep penetration of the Puraṇic gods. Kapilar, for example, sings of the four gods known to Puram poetry, namely Śiva, Viṣṇu, Balarāma and Subramanya. *Putansentanār* worships the trinity of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā.

All this poetic activity and concern for different divinities is significant but it does not total up to the all pervasive and permeating influence of the *Tirukkural.* Though essentially ethical and didactic in nature, its delineation of three among the four *Puruṣārthas* has interesting links with the traditions of drama which flowered in Tamil Nadu.

The formal elements of the *Tirukkural* take over, and use effectively, the conventions of Sangam literature. In the third part of *Kamattuppāl* each couplet is a dramatic monologue after similar monologues of the *akam* variety in Sangam literature. This part is divided into three sections: first, speeches by women; second, speeches by men; and finally, speeches by men and women both. There are other conventions which link the two streams. The ethical content of the *Tirukkural,* naturally, had its impact on the development of later dramatic literature, specially on works which deal with social and economic life. We need not pause to elaborate upon this here.

The Ālvārs and the Nāyanmārs deeply influenced people of all sections of society. They all sang their poetry and the musical melody was an indispensable part of their composition. This convention, naturally, affected theatrical forms of the region. The close connection of dance to this poetry is also well known and frequently commented upon. The Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs often used colloquial words and sang songs in folk melodies to carry home their message of *Bhakti.* It will thus be observed that while there was a strong rootedness in the earlier literary heritage common to all parts of India, the latter often drew upon local and regional themes and popular forms of artistic expressions. An outstanding example of this is Aṇḍal (or Aṇṭel) who used popular ballads and folklore to give expression to her feelings of the eternal longing of the human beings for godhood. We must remember that the role of the Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs was significant also for



Hanumāna in Kuṭiyaṭṭam



A Hunter in Seraikala Chau



The Great Characters of Yakṣagāna



Rāma in Puruliā Chau



Kirāt in Puruliā Chau

breaking class barriers and carrying the message of the meaninglessness of the hierarchical caste system, which runs as a central theme throughout their work.

In an earlier period also we find the same process of retaining an identity and yet achieving universality. The use of folk myth and local specific legend into something which can be called esoteric poetry is a common characteristic of literary creations. It is this capacity of establishing a dialogue between social levels and among various regions which gives the literatures of India their particular flavour and taste.

By the 9th century all influences merge into a strong cohesive flow. Kamban, the great epic poet of Tamil Nadu, epitomizes this synthesis. Some scholars place him in the 12th century. We have referred to his work in the context of the Kerala tradition. Suffice it to say here that although the story of Rāma was well known, Kamban made some radical departures from Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa.* Apart from his treatment of the character of Rāma, he introduces many changes in episodes, specially in those relating to Vālī and Sugrīva, etc., and which in turn filtered to the dramatic traditions of the Bhāgavatamelā forms of a much later period.

The literary activity was immense during the reign of the Colas and a rich body of epics revolving round the themes of Rāma and Śiva came into being in the 12th-13th century. The period is followed by another where many new poetic forms like the Paṭṭyaṭas and verse forms like Teyapām and Tantakam became popular.

It will perhaps be clear from the above that as in other adjacent areas, Tamil literature also nurtured many genres and forms. Some had links with Sanskrit literature, and others were purely indigenous and regional. Oral literature and local myths and legends played an important part in shaping the dramatic and poetic language. *Tiruvuntiyar,* the earliest work on *Śaiva Siddhānta*, is composed in the form of a sung narrative. Once again the literary word is set to melody, a tradition strong and powerful in popular literature of all regions. The great philosophic systems and mystical experiences were garbed in simple language and set to familiar tunes so that the masses at large could listen to them in the temple courtyard. Tattvarayar, a poet of the 14th century, wrote many such folk songs. Also, the stories of the Purāṇas were dramatized and performed inside or before the temples. Often high serious poetry and philosophic content was softened with humour for a social purpose. We find thus that in the so-called insulation of diverse groups within Indian society there were also inbuilt systems of communication. One of these vehicles, which also proved to be the most powerful and potent, was the theatre where the great epics and Purāṇas were given a popular form and lowly folk poetry was raised to mystical heights. The trend continued till the 18th century. The dialogue was continuous and mutually enriching.

The Telugu influences, or speaking more precisely the Telugu immigrants into Tanjore, thus walked into a fertile country where many varied forms and genres had flourished for many centuries. The particular form of the Bhāgavatamelā, however, came into being only by an interaction of two regions and not of different levels in the same region, although the latter was not absent.

Besides the Bhāgavatamelā, the form Kirtanai also developed, as a result of the

patronage which the Nāyaks and Marāthā kings gave to musicians. The compositions extol kings, while continuing to sing praises of the Lord. The repetitive mention of qualities and attributes was known as the Vakuppu; it becomes the name of a musical composition later. The most successful attempt in Tamil of using the Kīrtanai for dramatic purposes was by Aruṇācala Kavi. He dramatized the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his *Rāmaāṭaka-Kīrtanai* and most of this was sung. Later, many other poets follow this form where poetry and music co-mingle. A 19th century development of the Kīrtanai was to use it in the Kālakṣepam, the pure monologue. Music thus was integral to the literary composition and the two together were used in dramatic form.

The above salient features of Tamil literature are important for fully comprehending the nature of the new Telugu-based theatrical production. It will be clear that although from very early times the literary word and the musical sound were not mutually exclusive, in the late medieval period poetry leaned progressively heavily on the musical sound for expression. Dramatic presentation and rhythm, and finally, an attempt to create poetry which could be danced, naturally entered into the situation. This growth of literary theatre becoming increasingly musical is common to many parts of India.

To return thus to our story of the Bhāgavatamelā, let us recapitulate that by the 15th-16th centuries Tamil Nadu had a literary heritage comprising (a) Sangam literature, (b) the saint-poets, (c) the theatrical dramatic forms based on Sanskrit literature, (d) versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata,* (e) folk poetry which was sung, and (f) beginnings of the Kīrtanai forms.

It was into the situation that a group of immigrants from Andhra Pradesh entered Tanjore. Here in the early part of the 16th century evolved a form called the Bhāgavatamelā or, more precisely speaking, Yakṣagāna, both as a literary genre and as a theatrical mode. Its development, however, cannot be separated from the growth of Telugu literature. Indeed, the Bhāgavatamelā of Tamil Nadu continues to be a Telugu flowering in Tanjore. Perhaps this is why many scholars of Tamil literature have chosen not to consider it as an aspect of Tamil artistic history. However, since the contemporary Bhāgavatamelā and Bharatanāṭyam are in turn mutually dependent, neither can one ignore what was prevalent in Tamil Nadu prior to the Telugu migration nor can one consider the migration as a mere extension of Telugu into another adjacent region. What evolved in Tanjore courts under the Nāyak Kings and the patronage of later Marāṭhā rulers was the result of the Telugu migration of Tamil Nadu and the subsequent return of the Telugus to Andhra Pradesh nearly a hundred years later.

Before narrating this fascinating history of action and interaction, it would be worthwhile to make a brief detour into Telugu literature so as to understand how it was only natural and logical for the literatures and theatrical forms in the two regions to influence each other and thus evolve a literary genre which moved freely through the Bhāgavatālu, who were the mobile carriers of the literary word through visual presentation.

We know the origins of Telugu. From inscriptional evidence Telugu can be established as a distinct offshoot of the Dravidian group of languages emerging in the period A.D.

600-800. Between A.D. 800-1000 appeared many poetic compositions which used distinctive Kannada and Telugu metres. Unfortunately, very little of this literature has survived to enable one to reconstruct the form in which these compositions may have been written. Nevertheless, it is clear that there must have been a sufficient body of literary composition to draw upon before Nānnaya, the Ādikavi of Telugu, wrote his version of the *Mahābhārata* in the 11th century. Although the translation of the *Mahābhārata* was carried out at the behest of the King Rājārāja Narendra (A.D. 1022-1063), a reading of the unfinished work makes it clear that the author was acquainted with several Purāṇas and *Itihāsas* and was equally at home both in Sanskrit and Telugu. His translation of the *Ādiparva, Sabhāparva* and part of the *Vanaparva* is not merely literal. The poet takes frequent liberties with both content and form, omits some episodes and adds others. His work, although conforming to the spirit of Vyāsa, makes interesting and significant departures including a certain touch to didactism in upholding the Vedic *dharma,* a feature not emphasized in the original. He renders his poem in *campu* form which is a mixture of prose (*gadya*) and poetry (*padya*). His diction is new and refreshing and so impressive that many later writers attempted to emulate him. Besides the *Mahābhārata,* Nānnaya was also responsible for introducing into Telugu many Purāṇas particularly the *Brahmānanda Purāṇa.* The unfinished work of Nānnaya's *Mahābhārata* was completed by Tikkana in the 13th century (A.D. 1220-1300); but during the intervening period Telugu literature was enriched by many other poets who tackled new themes and evolved novel forms. Among these were both poets and writers on prosody. Malliya Racana was the author of a translation of the *Kumārasambhava.* Although with the discovery of a manuscript in the Sarasvatī Mahal Library some scholars have been recently of the view that the author lived in the 10th and not 12th century, the style and diction of the *Kumārasambhava* lead one to the conclusion that Telugu poetry must have been in prevalence for some time before such chiselled language could be used. What is of pertinence to us here is the fact that both the epics and the *Kāvyas* of Sanskrit literature had taken roots in the Telugu country by the 12th century. What is more is the fact that two distinct forms, *Mārgī* and *Deśī,* had also acquired a sufficient identity. Poets entered into a heated controversy about them. The debate on *Mārgī* and *Deśī,* as we know, was active in other spheres of the arts and commentators and writers on *Saṅgīta* and *Nāṭya,* including Sāraṅgadeva, the writer of the *Saṅgītaratnākara,* had devoted much attention to the subject. Other commentators of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* continually draw attention to the concept of the *Mārgī* and *Deśī.* The unfinished work of Nānnaya was completed by Tikkana and Errana who translated the remaining *parvas* of the *Mahābhārata.* Although like Nānnaya, Tikkana continues to use Sanskrit and Telugu, there is a marked bias in favour of the latter. Like his predecessor, his work is a recreation rather than a literal translation, and through it he gives Telugu literature a new dramatic vigour and dignity. Errana or Errapragada (A.D. 1300-1380) further enriched Telugu by using the *Prabandha* form for his work *Harivaṁśa* and the *Narasiṁha Purāṇa.* A translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is also attributed to him but unfortunately, this is extinct. Ketana, a contemporary, translated *Daśakumāracarita* and *Mitakṣara.*

A body of Śaiva literature is also found in the 12th century and there are towering poets like Mallikārjuna Paṇḍitārādhya (A.D. 1150) and Yathāvekkula Annamayya, the authors of *Śivatatva Sāram and Sarvesvara Śatakam* respectively. Palakuriki Somanāth contributed richly between A.D. 1200 and 1240 and among his other works, *Bāsavapurāṇa* and *Panditārādhya carita*, both of which he wrote in the *deśi dvipadā* metre, are still considered outstanding.

The story of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as opposed to the *Mahābhārata* and Śaiva literature caught the imagination of the Telugu writers in the period between A.D. 1240 and 1326, during which many poems and reinterpretations of the *Kāvya* began to appear. Of the many adaptations and revelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which appeared during the period, the two most important are *Raṅganatha Rāmāyaṇa*, attributed by some to Gona Buddha Reddi, and the *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa*. Although there is much controversy over the authorship and exact date of these compositions, it is clear that these were distinct Telugu versions, where many episodes were changed, transformed, omitted and added according to the needs of the time and the genius of the authors. They were also quite different from Kamban's *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is equally clear that these versions were composed for the general masses to be read and recited and which used the *campu* form with great dexterity and flexibility. We must also remember that these versions appeared about a century later than the Kannada *Pampā Rāmāyaṇa*. Many of the stories and episodes of the contemporary *Bhāgavatamelā* can be traced to these Telugu versions of the *Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa* and *Purāṇas* rather than to the original Sanskrit sources. Here an active dialogue among Kannada, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu is in evidence.

Literary history of Telugu is rich and varied between the 13th and 16th centuries, a period which saw the emergence of such writers as Ketana (A.D. 1200-50), Maraṇa Mancana (A.D. 1300), Nacana Soma and Madiki Siṅgana (A.D. 1420). They contributed significantly to Telugu literature through their translations and adaptations of many works of Sanskrit literature, such as *Prabodhacandrodaya, Kādambarī, Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, etc. *Ūṣāpariṇayam*, the popular story of Bhāgavatamelā and Kucipuḍi, is part of Nacana Somaana's *Uttara Harivaṁsu*. The *Pañcatantra* was also translated in Telugu about the same time. About this period also developed popular ballad forms in *deśī* metre called *mañjarī*. Śrīnātha (A.D. 1400), who wrote the *Palnati Vīra Caritam* in this metre, was also the author of another work called *Krīdābhirāmam* or *Vīthināṭakam*, which vividly portrayed the social life of Warangal. Alongside this heavy reliance on themes drawn from Sanskrit literature and the use of popular diction there appeared the song writers of the 15th century such as the famous Tallapaka Annāmācārya (A.D. 1408-1503) who composed nearly 30,000 songs in Sanskrit and Telugu. Annāmācārya was both a poet and a musician and to him is attributed the tradition of the poetic word sung to a definite melodic pattern. He was also the author of *Saṁkīrtana Lakṣaṇam* where individual devotional poems were set to particular *ragas*. And finally, there was the *Bhāgavatam* of Bammers Potana (15th century).

It will be clear from the above that by the 16th century the Telugu writers had not only drawn upon Sanskrit literature but had also experimented with many forms and

genres, which ranged from straight prose and Sanskrit metres, to Telugu *deśī* metrical forms and poetry both written and sung.

The *Prabandha* gained ground in the 16th century, perhaps on account of the direct and indirect influence of *Gīta-Govinda*. Contrary to the view held by some critics, the trend of merging poetry and music should not be considered as the beginning of decadence in literature. Indeed, it is to be remembered that the traditions of poetry heard (thus sung and danced) and poetry written (thus read or seen) were two parallel streams in all Indian literatures: only in certain periods one was more popular than the other. The late medieval period seems to have revived an early tradition by giving it a new vitality through the sung word. The *prabandha*, as is well known, was prevalent in other parts of India (particularly in the East). In Andhra Pradesh it became the ideal form during the time of Kṛṣṇadevarāya (16th century) and his contemporaries, the Aṣṭa Diggajas, who were all prolific writers of *Prabandhas*. While many themes are taken from the Purāṇas, others were original: each is characterized by a narrative tale set to rhymed verse. Amongst these was Nāndī Timmāna's *Pārijātāpaharaṇam* where he created the character of Satyabhāma who for centuries has been the heroine of the Andhra Bhāmakalāpam. The writer of the popular *Vemana Śatakam* was Vermana, who recited his verses to vast audiences.

It is against this vast landscape of five hundred years that we must examine the full flowering of the Yakṣagāna form of Telugu literature in the 16th and 17th centuries after its first nascent beginnings in the 11th century. The ballad forms, the *campu*, the *śataka* and the *deśī* metres, particularly the *dvipadī*, and the tremendous growth of musical styles and theoretical works all contributed to the making of the particular dramatic form called Yakṣagāna (now called in the oral traditions as Bhāgavatamelā or Bhāmakalāpam, etc.). It was a self-conscious attempt at bringing prose, recitation, sung word and mime together to present the themes of the *itihāsas*, Purāṇas, *kāvyas* and the devotional songs which had already become the accepted heritage of the people. A new southern school of Telugu literature emerged under the patronage of Raghunātha Nāyaka and his son Vijaya Rāghava Nāyaka (A.D. 1633-1673). *Prabandhas, dvipadī, kāvyas* and finally, Yakṣagāna emerged as the most popular forms in the Tanjore courts.

Among the eminent Yakṣagāna writers was Koneti Dīkṣita Candra, who composed a beautiful theatrical piece (with rhythmic prose passages, dialogues, verses and songs which could be danced) called *Vijaya Rāghava Kalyāṇam*. A woman writer called Paśupuleti Raṅgajāmmā wrote two *Prabandhas, Mannarudāsa Vilāsam* and *Ūṣāpariṇayam*: the song-drama of the Yakṣagāna type is followed in the first which uses eight different languages. The *Ūṣāpariṇayam*, although found in an incomplete manuscript, provides the bases of other Bhāgavatamelā nāṭakas based on this theme. They were preceded by Kaṇḍukuru Rudra Kavi who wrote *Sugrīva Vijayam* in A.D. 1568 and by the King Raghunātha Nayaka who wrote *Gajendramokśam, Rukmiṇī-Kṛṣṇa Vivāham* and *Jānakīpariṇayam*. His son Vijaya Rāghava Nāyaka had also composed a musical drama of Yakṣagāna type, called *Raghunāthābhyudayam*. Many other contemporaries and successors of these writers were authors of Yakṣagāna plays and contributed to the repertoire of Bhāgavatamelā and Andhra Yakṣagāna. Such plays included,

notably, *Govardhanadhāraṇam, Rukmiṇī Kalyāṇam, Satyabhāmāvivāham, Rādhā Mādhavam, Ūṣāpariṇayam, Kaṁsa Vijayam,* etc.

All are characterized by a high dramatic skill which dexterously uses different media, but always with an eye for the theatre. In this respect the Telugu writers were the true descendants of the Sanskrit dramatists. They were writing plays for the theatre and were not confining themselves to literary creation.

Sahaja or Saha Mahārāj, son of Ekoji of Tanjore (1678-1712), was not only a great musician but was also the writer of such Yaksagana plays as *Kirāta vilāsam, Gaṅgā Pārvati, Kṛṣṇa vilāsam, Jalakrīdā,* etc. The story of the writing of Yakṣagāna literature continues well into the late 18th and 19th centuries. Tamil Nadu seemed to have provided fertile ground for the immigrants of Andhra Pradesh who composed most of these plays which were sung and danced.

Both from external and internal evidence it is clear that Telugu literature, specially the *Prabandha* and the Yakṣagāna form, travelled from the Andhra country to Tanjore and Karṇāṭaka in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, where it flourished both as a literary genre and a dramatic poem. From the Andhra country Tirthanārāyaṇa Yogī migrated to Tanjore and in turn the Yakṣagāna travelled back to Andhra where it became the special preserve of the Kucipuḍi Brahmins and continues to be so to this day.

We thus have two parallel flowerings in the 18th and 19th centuries: one relating to Telugu literature in Tanjore and Karṇāṭaka, and other the performance of the plays in Andhra Pradesh. Both were coeval.

Tīrthanārāyaṇa Yogī, the author of the *Kṛṣṇa Līlā Taraṅgiṇī,* is today considered the father of the theatre forms of Bhāgavatamelā, Bhāmakalāpam and Kucipuḍi as distinct from the literary genre known as Yakṣagāna. He, like his predecessor Annāmācārya, was of the firm belief that the theatrical forms were vehicles of *sādhanā* and that the literary word was perfect only when communicated through a combination of music, dance and mime (*abhinaya*). The traditions begun by him were carried on by his followers in Tanjore, while Siddhendrayogī himself travelled back to Andhra.

Amongst the most distinguished of Tīrthanārāyaṇa Yogī's followers was Venkatarāman Śāstriar. He was the author of twelve plays which are today considered the core of the Bhāgavatamelā repertoire and include *Prahlāda, Mārkeṇeya, Uṣā, Rukmāṅgadā, Hariṣcandra, Gollabhāmā, Sītā Kalyāṇam, Rukmiṇī Kalyāṇam, Dhruva, Kaṁsavadha, Sāvitrī Vaibhavam and Bāṇāsura Vadham.* In direct line of the earlier Yakṣagāna, these plays are performed today in the villages around Tanjore, particularly Melattur, Soolamangalam, Oothukad, Salidmangalam, Nellur and Theperuma Nallur. As was to be expected, the themes of the earlier Yakṣagānas and the Purāṇic stories continue to be the chief inspiration.

In Melattur, Bharatam Nārāyaṇaswāmī and Bālu Bhāgavatar promoted the growth of the tradition. Scholars and servants such as Krishna Iyer and Dr. V. Raghavan gave the languishing form much encouragement and intellectual guidance in the thirties and the forties of this century and today it has received renewed recognition.

In Andhra Pradesh, the tradition was not discontinued after Tīrthanārāyaṇa Yogī left

for Melattur. The earlier rich traditions of literature, music and dance also continued to thrive there. Treatises like *Abhilāṣitārtha Cintāmaṇi* of Someśvara II, the *Nṛttaratnāvalī* of Jayappa Nāyak, *Vasantarājīyamu* of Kumargiri Reddi and *Saṅgīta Cintāmaṇi* of Pedakomati Verma bear testimony to the many forms of music and dance which were prevalent in the region under the distinguished guidance of many Brahmin Nāṭyācāryas. Palkuriki Somanātha vividly describes in his *Paṇḍitārādhya Carita* the musical and dance forms which were prevalent in Andhra. Some other inscriptional and architectural evidence tells us of the existence of the 'Balipīṭha', the stone slab immediately behind the Nandī in the temples, on which *Ārādhanā nṛtya* used to be performed by the *devadāsī*. The *Nṛttaratnāvalī* describes some of these dances.

It would appear that what came to be called Kucipuḍi was connected both with the literary writing of the medieval period called the *deśī* form and the pure dance forms which were closely associated with temple ritual and about which there is ample literary, inscriptional and archaeological evidence. While the *devadāsī* performed in temples and their poses were arrested in stone on the temple walls, the Kucipuḍi Brahmin boys formed itinerant troupes in village courtyards. Their repertoire was determined by contemporary religious cults and social movements. Thus, in the beginning the stories revolved around the *Śaiva Purāṇas* and after the great wave of Vaiṣṇavism, the popular stories of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* were given prominence. The performers themselves came to be called Bhāgavātālus. Some of them migrated to Melattur. From Melattur returned Siddhendra Yogī who learnt Kucipuḍi from his guru Tīrthanārāyaṇa Yogī. It is said that he saw Lord Kṛṣṇa dance on the body of his blind guru whom, as the legend goes, the Lord Himself had commanded to compose the story of *Pārijātāpaharaṇam*, if he desired salvation. Thus ordained, he composed the drama and then went in search of his actors and found two near the village Kucipuḍi. He trained the boys to perform the Bhāmakalāpam, the *piece de résistance* of the Kucipuḍi repertoire. This story of the vision of Siddhendra Yogī has to be understood against the background of not only the development of the literary form of the Yakṣagāna but also the most significant activity of the saint poets which was gaining ground in Andhra at the very moment when some Bhāgavātālus had migrated to Melattur. Among these latter was the towering Kṣetrāgna who belonged to Muvva village, only two miles from Kucipuḍi. He had also travelled to Tanjore and had rendered the Muvva Gopāla *Padams* in *Sāttvikābhjinaya.* No wonder, then, that Siddhendra Yogī came to look for his talent in the Kucipuḍi villages. Also, the spread of Vaiṣṇavism was then at its peak and the other parts of the country were echoing with the lyrics of Rāmadās, Tukārām, Mīrā and Caitanya. The *Pārijātāpaharaṇam* was one more intense expression of this fervent religious movement. However, in content and form Siddhendra Yogī followed the literary Yakṣagāna of the earlier period and of his contemporaries. The success of the play was such that he persuaded the Brahmin families of Kucipuḍi to take a vow that at least one male member of each family would play the part of Satyabhāmā once in his life-time. He also succeeded in making the Nawab of Golconda issue a copper plate in 1675 granting the village of Kucipuḍi as an Agrahāma to the families of the Brahmins who dedicated themselves to this art.

Today the Kucipuḍi has a repertoire of almost thirteen plays which have been composed by the followers of Siddhendra Yogī. The themes of some are common to the Bhāgavatamelā of Melattur and others are different. Both, however, lean heavily on the Yakṣagāna dramas mentioned in the foregoing pages.

We find thus that the court literary drama travelled to devotees and *yogīs* who transformed the literary tradition into popular form, orality was of essence. Both the traditions, however, continued to maintain strong affinities between them. Now the dramatic content was passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth without the aid of written scripts. In Melattur as well as in Kucipuḍi, Brahmin families have been responsible for the continuance of this custom, though gradually in the last thirty years many changes have taken place and young men from other communities have also been trained in the art. One of these families was headed by Calla Bhāgavatam Vāsambhotlu was migrated from Kucipuḍi to the village of Kotakonda in Kurnool district. At seventy he could still perform the role of Satyabhāmā. Among other gurus was Cintāmaṇi Kṛṣṇamūrti whose outstanding disciple Vedāntam Satyanārāyaṇa has presented the story in many parts of India. The latter has also been chiefly responsible for culling out the *nṛtta* (pure dance) content from the dance-dramas and evolving a dance style which can be called Kucipuḍi as distinct from the dance-drama form of the same generic name. Prahlāda Śarmā is another outstanding name in this context. The tradition continues with dramatic innovations and reconstructions in the hands of Vempati Chinna Satyam.

While narrating these parallel developments in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu one must also bear in mind the growth and evolution of the dance-form called Bharatanāṭyam which was a transformed version of the earlier Dāsīaṭṭam, Sādirnṛtya and Devadāsī dance-forms prevalent in Mysore and Andhra. It will also perhaps be clear that both in Andhra and in Tamil Nadu there were two kinds of performances, one in the temple, involving women dancing solo or in group; and the other belonged to the village or the temple courtyard where performances were presented exclusively by men. We encounter this phenomenon in Orissa in the context of the Mahāris of the temples and the Goṭipuas of the Ākharās.

To these two levels has to be added a third, which seems to have emerged much later but which had its connections with both. This is true of the theatrical forms such as the Kurvañjis, the Veethināṭakam and the Terukoothu forms, which, specially the last two, permeated to the so-called backward and lower classes, but which in theme, content and form shared many elements with the other two levels. The Jātrā of Orissa and of Bengal in Eastern India have to be seen as parallels. The Bhavāi falls somewhere in between the temple courtyard and the street forms.

As has been pointed out at the outset, all these have to be distinguished from the simultaneous and parallel survivals of hundreds of tribal and folk music and dance forms which are known to these regions and to which also they are connected. The street form such as Veethināṭakam is an interesting example of the theme, content and form of the brahminical traditions filtering to social groups identified as tribals. This form is today restricted to the Yenadi tribe: its stories, however, are Purāṇic and its characters are from

the *Bhāgavata*. As pointed out earlier, its structure has many affinities with the Sanskrit theatre both in its preliminaries and in some of its theatre conventions.

Terukoothu, today considered a totally folk form, also manifests the same characteristics and has unmistakable links with the structure of the sophisticated literary forms.

Space will not allow for a fuller consideration of the internal evidence provided by the literature in Telugu and Tamil which throws significant light on the development of these forms. Nor is it possible to consider here the sculptural and inscriptional evidence which reinforces our argument of the interconnections of regions and artistic modes and styles. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this brief survey will give some idea of the zigzag patterns of developments which have all to be seen as parts of an organic whole and not as separate exclusive islands. Also, the broad currents of the interaction between Sanskrit and regional literatures, between *Mārgī* and *Deśī* literary forms, musical styles and theatrical modes, between the theoretical treatises and the creative works, and finally between the literary and the oral traditions have to be kept in mind while looking at forms which, once looked down upon as rustic folk-drama, are today being used as raw material for *avant-garde* theatre in urban centres. Within them, they embody the secrets of the Indian cultural pattern which is flexible and has a tenacity to survive, while adhering to certain timeless, changeless fundamentals common to all.

Against this background and keeping in mind the historical perspective of the literary ...sagāna and the oral Bhāgavatamelā, and the pattern of inter-connectedness of regions ... artistic expressions, let us look at the theatrical spectacles themselves.

...āgavatamelā

One travels to Melattur through the lush vegetation of rice fields and coconut palms of Tamil Nadu. A stream of the river Kāverī flows nearby. The village was given as a gift by Acyuthāppā Nāik to the migrant Brahmin families. The Varadarājāswāmī temple is the centre of activity, religious and social. The Narasiṁhajayantī is held in May and June: this is the time of presenting the Bhāgavatamelā nāṭakam.

A thatched auditorium is constructed in front of the temple: the pandal may have a length of 100-120 feet and the stage has a depth of 18-20 feet. The deity is installed in the front hall of the temple: symbolically the performance is dedicated to the deity. As in the case of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Kathākali and Yakṣagāna, the performances begin at 9.30 p.m. and continue till the early hours of the morning.

The green room is an adjoining thatched hut, where are held simple ritualistic preliminaries. The performance itself begins, unlike in Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Yakṣagāna, with the entry of Koṇāgī or the *Vidūṣaka* on a bare stage, even without musicians. He dances for a few minutes, speaks to the audience in prose, and then leaves. The musicians appear next in a group and sing the Thodayamaṅgalam. Of the Bhāgavatamelā, however, is strictly a musical composition and there is no dancing: it consists of poetic passages or *sabhās* and pure mnemonic rhythm syllables, the sollukaṭṭus. This is followed by the appearance on the stage of a young boy with the mask of a Gaṇeśa. He dances for a few

minutes to the singing of an invocatory verse on Gaṇeśa which seeks the blessings of the deity. Though we have also observed this preliminary in the context of the Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna there is an important difference: in the latter it is often performed in the green room or behind the curtain and not necessarily in full view of the audience.

This over, the performance begins with the entry of the chief characters. This part is known as the *pātra-praveśa.* The *oḍḍolaga* of Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna is analogous to *pātra-praveśa* of Bhāgavatamelā. Bhāgavatamelā characters also appear behind a curtain held by two stage hands. As in the Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Kathākali and Yakṣagāna, there is some pure dancing at this stage. The stances, the particular gait and the specific dance patterns indicate the nature of the character through stylised body language. This section also provides for the actor-dancer to exhibit his skill as a dancer which he cannot do freely in the body of the play. The *Gaṇeśa vandanā* and the introduction of the character through abstract movements seem to be common features of many dance-drama forms all over India, including the North, West and East. Many literary compositions of the Telugu Yakṣagāna, however, do not refer to the *Gaṇeśa vandanā*. It is likely that this was introduced by the rulers of the Tanjore courts, and is today only a sphere of experimentation.

After these preliminaries the play itself begins, where the actor follows the same technique as we had noticed in Kuṭiyaṭṭam and in Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna. He sometimes speaks his lines, at other times recites them in the various metres of the lit[illegible] composition, particularly the *dvipadī:* often he sings the lines in specific *ragas.* [illegible]ne highly stylized syllabic recitation of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam actor-dancer is replaced bot[illegible]am Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā by simple recitative modes which ultimately give [illegible]āsi to pure song. Unlike the Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna, most of the singing is done by the ac[illegible]in themselves and not by the accompanying musicians or the Bhāgavatārs. The actor naturally has to be a polyvalent artist who must speak, recite, sing and dance. A number of stock conventions are followed in the rendering of the literary content beginning with the recitation and then going on to the execution of the song with adequate mime (*abhinaya*), all culminating in a pure dance sequence with triplets as seen in the dance-form Bharatanāṭyam. The vocabulary of the hand-gestures is richer and more elaborate than in the Yakṣagāna of Karṇāṭaka and one can discern very close connections with the nṛtya (mime with dance) of Bharatanāṭyam proper. The pure dance portions also have the same common pattern of the sung mnemonics, the sollukaṭṭus and the tirmāṇams of Bharatanāṭyam. The convention of singing the *Tiramāṇams* has been given up in Bharatanāṭyam except in numbers like the *śabdam* but is uniformly followed both in the Bhāgavatamelā and the Kucipuḍi.

The musical content is rich: the songs of the actors are called *dārus* (perhaps a derivation from the Sanskrit *dāru*) and follow the general structure of a *Kṛri* of Karnatic music. Venkatarāman Śāstrī and his father Gopāl Kṛṣṇa Śāstrī used particular *ragas* for different characters. Hiraṇyakaśipu's entrance *dāru* is sung in Devagāndhārī *rāga.* In contrast, Prahlāda enters on with a *dāru* is sung in Bhairavī *rāga.* The continuity of a particular character is maintained by using the same *rāga* for the character, sometimes

throughout the play. This requires great skill of synchronization both by the actors-singers and the accompanying musicians. Varied verse forms such as *cūrṇikā pada* and *padavarṇa* are used. As in the *varṇam* of Bharatanāṭyam, sometimes the accompanying musicians only sing the *svara* passages of the poetic line and the actor interprets this through abstract dance. This technique has the advantage of first establishing the poetic line and then reinforcing its import by the pure musical melody and the dance movements. Indeed, portions of the character-songs of the Bhāgavatamelā tradition could be bodily lifted with little modification to form complete number of a solo Bharatanāṭyam performance. While this approach makes for a richer dance and musical content, it suffers from the disadvantage of making the narrative come to a standstill for long durations. In comparison, the Yakṣagāna of Karṇāṭaka moves swifter. There, pure dance sequences are employed mainly as quick finales and nearly always for enhancing dramatic effect rather than as a pause.

Until recently the musicians accompanied the actors and walked with them: of late the practice has been given up and instead, they sit in two rows as in a Bharatanāṭyam performance. Again as in a Bharatanāṭyam performance the orchestra comprises a *naṭṭuvanar* whose role is important, but not quite as crucial as that of the Bhāgavatār in Yakṣagāna: he is nevertheless the chief conductor and director of the performance and guides both the musicians and the dancer. There are then the vocalists, a *mṛdaṅga* player and either a flute or, as of late, a violin player. The singing styles are strictly in Karnatak modes and many compositions closely resemble the *Kṛtis* of Tyāgarāja who was a contemporary of Venkatarāman Śāstrī. The musical melodies owe much to the genius of the famous Karnatic music trinity of Tyāgarājā, Dīkṣitar and Śyāmā Śāstrī.

The dance content closely resembles the Bharatanāṭyam technique of movement. The *ardhamaṇḍalī* or the *ukkaramaṇḍalī* is observed strictly, although it is not quite as clearly defined as by the women dancers. There is a body of *adavu* patterns which include all the varieties. The same taut position of the upper torso and the triangular position of the lower limbs is maintained in all dance sequences. The head movement particularly the *sundarī* (the lateral movement), is used frequently and the arms are held out as in Bharatanāṭyam and are used in straight lines and triangles, and never in curves. The three *kalās* are used in the pure rhythmic passages and the tiramāṇam ends in araddhis as in Bharatanāṭyam. Attention has already been drawn to the *abhinaya* technique which also closely resembles the Bharatanāṭyam technique of a line to line and word to word synchronization of word and gesture. Yakṣagāna of Karnataka follows a freer and less stylized system in this sphere.

The Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna characters through their costuming and make-up, their dramatic entries, stylized gaits and walks become the *dramatis personae* of the drama: the Bhāgavatamelā by comparison has a narrative air about it, although its musical content and dance technique are sometimes richer and more complex.

The costuming of Bhāgavatamelā is vastly different from anything we witnessed in the Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna. Although the male characters are dressed grandiosely with much tinsel and brocade, they are realistic and there is no attempt at stylization as in

Kathākali and Karnataka Yakṣagāna. Indeed, the costumes can be traced to the costuming styles prevalent in the Marāthā courts. Here then is an anachronism which is built into the dramatic form. Although the themes are Purāṇic and in one sense timeless, the costumes are distinctively period costumes. The young boys who play the role of women *strī-veśa* dress much in the style of the Bharatanāṭyam dancer, although some appear in *sārīs* as worn in everyday life. The make-up is of the simplest naturalistic type despite the use of large moustaches for demoniac types and none for heroes. Conventions of make-up are minimal except for the mythical characters like Narasiṁhāvatāra, Hiraṇyakaśipu, etc., and others where both masks and make-up are used. We find that while the Karṇāṭaka Yakṣagāna and the Bhāgavatamelā share a similar literary heritage and follow some common themes, the former developed into a powerful dramatic form with a distinctive stylization, and the Bhāgavatamelā forms developed into lyrical dramas mostly revolving around love themes (*Sṛṅgāra rasa*). The musical content and the dance technique also gave rise to two clearly distinct styles with strong regional and even local identities.

Kucipuḍi

The Brāhmaṇa Bhāgavatālu or Kucipuḍi as a theatrical form developed in Andhra on similar lines, but once again the differences between the theatrical form of Bhāgavatamelā of Tamil Nadu and Kucipuḍi or Bhāmakalāpam of Andhra are clearly defined and the one cannot be mistaken for the other. The literary heritage in this case was almost identical but the theatrical forms became distinct. As has been mentioned before, the Kucipuḍi boys were itinerant groups, more mobile than the Bhāgavatārs of the Bhāgavatamelā. They were influenced more by the compositions of Siddhendra Yogī and his followers and were closer to the vast body of Yakṣagāna musical drama writing in Telugu. In course of time from amongst the large varied repertoire of the Telugu Yakṣagāna musical drama, only a few plays were performed by the theatrical groups. The remaining body of the dramatic literature is today restricted only to literary circles and no longer form part of the theatrical traditions. The most popular amongst these was the Bhāmakalāpam, or the story of Satyabhāmā. Today it constitutes the most important play of the Kucipuḍi repertoire although plays like the *Gollakalapām* and others are also occasionally performed.

In theatrical form and style, however, the Bhāgavatamelā and Kucipuḍi have many features in common. The play begins with the *Gaṇeśa vandanā*, but the *Vidūṣaka* is now absent. Instead, Satyabhāmā appears in Bhāmakalāpam behind the curtain held by two stage hands and throws her braided plait over the curtain. This is also a challenge to any one in the audience to dance as well. The Bhāgavatār sings the lines and the boy-actor in woman's role performs some preliminaries behind the stage. Thereafter, the Bhāgavatār who also acts as the *Sūtradhāra* appears on the stage and introduces the play. The role of the *Sūtradhāra* (who is both the Bhāgavatār and the *naṭṭuvanar*) is significantly much more important than his counterpart in the Bhāgavatamelā. He is narrator, singer, conductor and the inter-linker of different passages. The story of Satyabhāmā, Rukmiṇī

and Kṛṣṇa then moves swiftly and rapidly. The actor-dancer, however, speaks his lines minimally: only the prose passages are rendered and often the actor-dancer enters into a dialogue with the *Sūtradhāra.* For the best part, the literary verses are sung by the accompanying musicians. There is, however, the same structure as in Bhāgavatamelā of the *dārus* or the *dhruva* songs and the use of the different *ragas* for different characters. The actor speaks his lines, which is followed by the vocalist who sings and the dancer who performs mime much in the style of the Bhāgavatamelā dancers. This again is followed by pure *nṛtta* (abstract dance) patterns in a dance-style distinctive to Andhra. The mnemonics (*sollukaṭṭus*) and *tiramāṇams*, follow the Karnataka *tāla* system and the five *jatis*.

The *nṛtta* and *abhinaya* technique, however, has a distinctive Andhra character. The *ardhamaṇḍalī* is held with a slight hip deflexion, a feature unknown to the Bharttanāṭyam is absent. The arms are used less tersely with some curves and circular patterns. The basic system of *adavus*, however, is followed as in the Bharatanāṭyam and there is the usual flat foot toe and toe-heel "Kudita Mitta" dance sequences. As in the Bharatanāṭyam they culminate in triplets and *araddhis* and the familiar tai-di tai tai-tai-di di tai, etc. The *sollukaṭṭus* or the mnemonics are sung as in the Bhāgavatamelā although in some recent recitals they are also recited as in the Bharatanāṭyam.

The entire dramatic spectacle is richly interspersed with these *nṛtta* passages, and the pure mime to the sung line takes the story forward. The *āngikābhinaya* (hand-eye-body gestures) follows the technique of the Bhāgavatamelā with a similar although not as stylized vocabulary of *hastābhinaya* (hand-gestures) as in the Bharatanāṭyam. There is occasionally a line-to-line interpretation, for the best part however it is a word-to-word sequential synchronization of the sung word and the miming of the actor. Both the Bhāgavatamelā and the Bhāmakalāpam in this respect are more descriptive and narrative in character than the Yakṣagāna and the Kathākali which give great scope to the actor for improvisation or *manodharma.* This is, however, not to say that the opportunities are absent, for in the purely lyrical portions where the heroine pines for the God Kṛṣṇa there is the same scope for *abhinaya, angika* and *sāttvika* as in the *padams* of Bharatanāṭyam. Indeed, the contemporary Kucipuḍi is an aspect of this larger dramatic landscape and with the *nṛtta* numbers and *padas* are part and parcel of the Bhāmakalāpam dance-drama.

The costuming, though richer than in the Bhāgavatamelā, is more or less of the same type. The style of draping the *sārī* of those representing female characters is distinctive to Andhra and is today being used by solo Kucipuḍi dancers. The male characters appear less in period costumes than in generic timeless costumes. Often the bare torso is also coloured, synchronizing with the nature of the character. Both the costuming and the manner of entrance into the stage establish the character as in the other forms.

It must have been noticed that the character of *Vidūṣaka* is by and large absent in the Bhāmakalāpam of Andhra. The romantic themes and the deep Vaiṣṇava import perhaps account for this. He appears again in the Veethināṭakam which takes its themes from the Purāṇic tales and the literary compositions of the Yakṣagāna; but there he injects into them great contemporaneity through social satire, sarcasm, comments on immediate

local problems, etc. The characters enter in stylized gaits, declaim and use much more prose than in the Bhāgavatamelā forms, but they do not use as much *nṛtta* and stylized miming. The lyrical romantic flavour of the Bhāgavatamelā form is replaced by a heavy melodramatic style full of earthly banter, through which large masses are reached and social messages are conveyed.

The Terukoothu of Tamil Nadu also follows the same pattern. Both the forms remind one of the less sophisticated form of Yakṣagāna, although none of the costuming and make-up conventions are shared.

We find thus that the forms in the regions have many affinities and some sharp differences. While some features are shared by two forms, some others are shared with a third form. Thus a pattern of overlapping circles is an evidence when examined from the point of view of their inner structure, design and technique.

V

CHAU

From the literary drama of the South, the procession theatre of Bengal and Orissa, the Vaiṣṇava dance drama of Manipur and Assam, and the cycle plays of Rāmalīlā and Rāsalīlā the forms called the Chau are a far cry. At first sight they appear to be glittering pieces of unusual dramatic structure and performing techniques. Indeed, when the Seraikala Chau dancers travelled to Europe in 1938 they were welcomed as isolated fragments of antiquity unrelated to other Indian traditions.

Over the last 25 years we have learned more, not only about the technique of these forms but also about the ecological and social environment in which they evolved and developed.

The three forms known by the generic term Chau belong to eastern India, particularly to the districts of Mayurbhanj, Purulia and Singhbum. In the not too distant past both Mayurbhanj and Seraikala in the Singhbhum district were parts of Orissa. It is only in the forties that Seraikala became a district of Bihar.* Purulia, similarly, earlier belonged to Bihar and is today a part of Bengal. This spatial spread and mutual proximity provide a clue to affinities and distinctiveness which characterise these forms.

The ecological, physiological, geographical and social environments and the multiplicity of ethnic types found in the area are well known. The vegetation extends from the marshland to dry barren hills between Mayurbhanj and Purulia. The riverbeds and the hills which intersect the region result in small isolated pockets of civilization and culture. The region even today is known for a vast variety of ethnic groups normally identified as the Hos, the Mundas, the Oraons, the Saoras, the Juangas and many others. Its tribal culture is rich and has provided material for the study of the varied patterns of the Orissan arts. Besides the tribal groups, who continue to be food-gatherers, wanderers, fishermen, shift-cultivators, etc., there are others who are normally called the caste Hindus. Both have had continuous dialogue with each other although the farmer has been the mainstay of the agricultural economy of the area. Then, there are, of course, the normal divisions of Indian society into the Kṣatriyas, Brāhmins, etc.

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* After the bifurcation of Bihar in November 2000, all these districts now fall under the newly created state of Jharkhand, which was South Bihar previously.

It is characteristic of Indian culture that in spite of this stratification in socio-economic terms the artistic forms do not reflect isolation or exclusiveness. We had observed in the case of Bhāgavatamelā forms that, although they were largely performed by Brāhmins, there was a wide scope for the participation of all classes and sects of society. In the case of a sophisticated form like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam we had also observed the paths of inbuilt mobility and dialogue between different strata of society through the theatrical performance. In the case of the Chau forms we see another aspect of the same phenomenon: in this case, most of the performers are persons who belong to sections of society normally called the socio-economic depressed classes or those listed as the Scheduled tribes/castes. These economically deprived classes and socially backward groups are the creators and makers of a form of theatre which contains within itself all the elements of a highly evolved, structured Indian theatre. In artistic terminology it would be called the *deśī* theatre in contrast to the traditions of the Kuṭiyaṭṭam, etc. which are termed as *mārgī*. However, a closer examination will reveal that although the two are distinct, they represent only segments within a cicle and no more. They are no polarities of a linear progression.

This sociological picture is necessary to underline the fact that in the Indian context the term folk and classical or *mārgī* and *deśī* do not represent a hierarchy of artistic value. They are only segments within the periphery of a circumference. In this section, therefore, we have with purpose deviated from our plan of giving a literary historical perspective of the form and have instead attempted to examine the paradox of highly chiselled, sophisticated forms living and being created in an environment of socio-economic backwardness.

The three forms, however, do not present an identical picture nor can one say that the setting of economic backwardness was a permanent background throughout history. Their socio-economic status may well be the result of the last 100 years or more.

In any case as far as the lack of economic affluence goes, this is today common to both the performers of the Bhāgavatamelā of South India and the rickshaw pullers of Purulia, even if their respective social status may be at great variance.

To come back to the Chau forms and groups of people who take part in the dramatic spectacle, it would appear that the poorest among these today are those who present the Purulia Chau. They are also all, without exception, listed as the Scheduled Castes. The Mayurbhanj community presents another big group. This time they are not persons who are considered low in social strata, but belong to a community of people called the pāikas, who were possibly the official militia of the Mayurbhanj princes. The Seraikala dancers on the other hand belong to the Kṣatriya caste and the dances are not only patronized by the princes of the State but the princes have also been the teachers, performers and mask-makers. We thus see that an artistic expression of an analogous nature is common to all strata of society and is not restricted to one particular social or economic group.

While we shall deal with each of these forms separately, it is necessary to point out the similarity and distinctiveness among the three forms and their relationship to other

types of theatre. As in the case of theatre and dance-drama in other parts of India, here also the artistic form moves on two planes: one is related to the Sanskrit tradition and its thematic content is drawn from the Purāṇas and epics, while the other is purely local, regional or indigenous and draws heavily upon the oral traditions.

Each of these forms has vital connections with allied forms in their region and naturally with each other. The Mayurbhanj dance stands in an intermediary position within the vast variety of tribal dances particularly of Ganjam district and the chiselled Gotipuas & Mahāri dances of Puri. In Orissa all levels can be discerned. This is, however, not true of either Bihar or Bengal, particularly of Purulia Chau and Seraikala Chau. Here, in spite of the existence of a very strong and rich tribal culture and a pervasive tradition of the kīrtanīyās, there is no direct artistic overlayering or superimposition, so evident in Orissa.

In the context of the Chau forms, therefore, it is more fruitful and worthwhile to trace in main, mutual interconnections. The Seraikala Chau and the Mayurbhanj Chau have many points of contact, epecially those relating to aspects of technique, musical accompaniment and costumes. The masks, however, are common to Purulia and Seraikala Chau but are non-existent in the Mayurbhanj. The epic narrative character of the themes is known to Purulia and Mayurbhanj but is absent in Seraikala Chau, where each single composition does not exceed eight or ten minutes. The costume represent an equally intriguing and fascinating picture of many moments of time, representing an amalgam of diverse periods of history.

Seraikala Chau

Let us first look at the Seraikala Chau. As has been mentioned earlier, Seraikala is situated in what was the Singhbhum district of Orissa. It formed part of Bihar and is now in Jharkhand. The small princely state is surrounded by the hills of Sarand and Bangri. The Kharkei river flows through the entire territory. It gives it a fertile vegetation throughout the year unlike Purulia, which is barren and rocky country. The history of Seraikala remains to be written; all that one can learn from records in chronicles is that this small princely state did not come under Mughal or for that matter even Maratha rule. This one factor of isolation may well account for the continuity of culutral traditions which may be traced back perhaps to the pre-Christian era. In more recent times, it was only in 1820 that the princes signed a treaty with the British. The territory is small with a population of about a million only, which continues to have a cohesive society where the commoner and the prince are all members of the same group.

The artistic history of Seraikala Chau is shrouded in mystery. So far no text or manuscript or inscriptions have been discovered. There are only a few architectural remains and a few miniature paintings to tell us of any tradition of poetry, dance-drama or sculpture in the area. We have, therefore, only today's theatrical spectacle to go by. But that too we are obliged to see within a social and cultural environment, which—unlike the situation in South India, Bengal, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, etc.— does not leave much scope for an examination of the performance as a developemnt of certain literary

and poetic forms. This is not to say that the form is devoid of thematic content or acquaintance with myth, legend or speculative thought. On the contrary, the familiarity with myth and legend, with Purāṇic stories, epic themes and allegorical symbolism is eloquent in the repertory of the Seraikala Chau.

There has been some controversy over the word Chau as used for the three forms prevalent in Mayurbhanj, Seraikala and Purulia. Some scholars have been of the opinion that the word Chau is derived from the word *chāyā* or shadow. This opinion was held by many performers, including the Rājā of Seraikala. Others have strongly challenged this view and have attempted to provide alternate interpretations. One such interpretation has been to connect the word Chau with the Sanskrit word *Chadma*, meaning disguise. A second interpretation has been suggested by drawing attention to colloquial Oriya, according to which the word may stand for an armour or the act of hunting stealithily. Yet a third interpretation has sought to derive the meaning from a link beween it and the chāuṇi (military camp). While it is not necessary to resolve the controversy relating to this single word, it is significant that these forms should take their name from a function or a vocation rather than from a caste (as in the case of the Bhāgavatamelā forms) or from an activity of a whole community in the process of a pilgrimage (as in the case of *yātrā* or other procession theatre forms known to other parts of India). Judging from the fact that many sections of society take part in all the three types of Chau and that in most cases they belong to the military class, it would be reasonable to accept that hunting or attacking stealthily is perhaps the most apt meaning of the word, although the idea of a disguise is inherent because in at least two forms, masks are used. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, for example, asserts that Chau is derived from *chadma* or disguise. Indeed he draws attention to the fact that the Tibetan word 'cham' stands for a mask and the Mundari word 'chak' for a ghost. In Assam also, the word 'choughar' (disguise-house) is used for green rooms.

The Seraikala Chau is patronised by the princes and is also performed by them. The tribals, agriculturists and the martial groups participate. The last group is important because it constitutes the dancers; the other sections are equally indispensable. We shall soon see how the ritual preceding the dance gives an opportunity to all sections of society to participate in it and how representatives of each community have a special role to play.

In the case of the Bhagavatamelā and Yakṣagāna forms, we have noticed that the ritual takes place behind the curtain or in the green room. In the case of Chau, the ritual is not a prelude to the dance but is indeed the whole festival. What is recognized as dance is restricted only to the last three days of a 26-day festival held in the month of *Caitra*. Both in Mayurbhanj and Seraikala the community gets together to hold the ritual 26 days prior to the *Caitra parva* concluding on *Vaiśākhī*, which is celebrated on 13th April. In the Seraikala Chau, communities like the Telī, Tamilī, Khandra, Kansārī, Pātras, Gudiā, Baniā and Bādiā take part in the preliminary ritual.

There is a continuation here of some tribal ritual as is evident from the erection of a pole and the procession. For the shift cultivator the functional aspect of the ritual seems to have a connection with the agricultural cycle, because why else would the festival be

held in *Caitra*? Again, the pole becomes now the symbol of 'Siva the *lingam*, and object of worship. In both Mayurbhanj and Seraikala, the main phases of the ritual revolve around the bathing *ghātas*. On the first day a procession starts towards a temple of Siva, which has a very elementary form of *liṅgam*. The people who comprise the procession come from all the communities mentioned above. They are initiated for the duration of the festival and become Brāhmins or *Bhagatas* or *Bhaktas*. They also change their caste names for the time being, acquire the *Śiva gotra*. This procession of the *Bhagatas* starts from the Majnagāṭa, which is the royal bathing *ghāṭa*. The procession is led by a man who holds a pole called the *jarjarā*. After the temple they visit the palace and finally an arena which is the consecrated dancing arena known as the *ākhaḍā*. The following night takes place the first ceremony of the *yātrāghata*. The first full pitcher also called the *maṅgala* or the *maṅgalaghaṭa* is the auspicious pitcher symbolizing fertility and continuity. It must be remembered that the person who carries this auspicious pitcher is the *telī*. There is an elaborate worship of the *ghaṭa* and thereafter the *telī* places this *ghaṭa* on the body of another man who is especially chosen for the occasion and is known as the *ghaṭawāli*. The *ghaṭawāli's* body is completely painted with vermilion; he wears a *dhotī* on the lower half of the body. Once again here, there is a significant transference and symbolism full of multiple meaning. The *maṅgalaghaṭa* representing fertility and fullness is placed on the head of someone who for that moment and duration begins to represent energy and therefore movement and activity. Indeed, the water inside the *yātrāghaṭa* is known as the *Śakti*. The man who carries this naturally becomes the consecrated person who must then merge into the Śiva form.

Gradually, the *ghaṭawāli*, to the accompaniment of the drums and singing, falls into a trance. This symbolically represents union. The *ghaṭawāli* finally places the pitcher next to the *Śivaliṅga* in the temple in that state, representing a symbolic union of Siva and Sakti. Thereafter the procession returns to the palace. The accompanying *bhagatas* by that time are in a state of expectation and begin to dance or roll on the ground. This part of the ritual is very different from the ritual in Mayurbhanj where there is an elaborate ritual of the pole, and where the consecrated person hangs on the pole with a fire below. In Seraikala the ritual is simple.

The second ritual is performed on the following days but this time it revolves around Kṛṣṇa and is known as *Vrindāvani*. However, much mixing and synthesis must have taken place because what is depicted as *Vrindāvanī* has little to do with Vrindāvan; it actually presents the story of Hanumān when he was destroying Laṅkā. The symbolic significance, however, is clear, because in each case it is the protectiveness of Viṣṇu which is represented. The venue of the second ritual is the palace.

Yet another ritual called the *Kālikāghaṭa*, represents the third aspect of creation, relating to desire and its subsequent destruction. This time the pitcher is taken to the *Śivaliṅga* by one who is all dressed in black and not in red. Also the *ghaṭa* is not decorated like the *yātrāghaṭa* or the *maṇgalaghaṭa*. Besides, there is the ceremony of burying this *ghaṭa* near the *Śivaliṅga* to be taken cut only the following year, at the same time. Symbolicaly, this represents the closing of another cycle because one *bhagata* lies

outside seemingly dead and it is only through the touch of the king or some other person that he can be revived.

On that night and on the night of the Kāmanāghaṭa no performance takes place.The dance begins after all these rituals have been performed and the dancing arena is ready and consecrated for a performance.

Once we are in the arena, emphasis is placed on purely artistic values which must be considered against the background of the ritual but not assessed outside the formal structure.

The technique of the Seraikala Chau performance is based, as in the case of other two Chau forms, on an evolved and developed system of exercises known as the *Parikhaṇdā*, which are practised by the martial groups early in the morning near the river-bed on a place which is especially earmarked for this practice. The whole movement technique emerges from the style of the sword and shield play (*Parikhaṇdā*) and this has given rise to a vocabulary of movement which uses, as vehicles of expression for me, the lower limbs rather than the face and the hands, so characteristic of other dance styles.

As in the case of other two Chaus, the Seraikala Chau also follows a definite pattern of body stances and poses, walking patterns and dance movements, which result from a combination of primary movements and poses. Although it would be difficult at first sight to discern the fundamental poses or geometric motifs which govern the movement technique, a close look will reveal that the dancer is building movement from a variation of the *trabhanga*. There is both a deflection of the head from the pivotal joint of the neck as also a deflection of the hip from the pelvis joint; only, there is no deep bending of the knees, a feature emphasized in Mayurbhanj Chau. Both Mayurbhanj Chau and Purulia Chau use the *cauka* (square)—that is the open *grand plié* or *maṇḍalasthāna*—position in a variety of ways. The Seraikala Chau dispenses with the open *cauka* (square) motif.

The torso is used more often than not in a spiral movement in opposition to the movements of the hips and lower limbs. The frontal picture is replaced either by a 3/4 or by a profile. This is achieved by a diagonal movement, amounting almost to a screwing of the body. The shoulders, therefore, invariably make an oblique line often front-back or up-down diagonally. These fundamental stances and a set position of the arms with one hand above the head as if holding a sword and the other at the waist level as if holding a shield give the dance style its kinetic vocabulary.

The first exploration of space is elementary as in the *adavus* of the Bharatanātyam and the *arasās* of Orissi. In either of these dance styles or for that matter in Manipuri or Kathak, weight is held in its primary movements on one foot or one leg and the other leg is free to explore space in all directions. In Seraikala Chau also the first movements belong to this category. The terminology is descriptive and the group of these elementary movements are called the *cālis*. The word *cāli* or *cali* occurs in dance texts in Sanskrit from the earliest times and is used uniformly throughout India. Its meaning, however, changes from region to region. In Seraikala it denotes both direction and the nature of the path of movement in space. The first three *cālis* are just known by the simple words,

āge (front), *piche* (back), *ārahi* or *adali* (crosswise or diagonal). The next three are indicative of the nature and the manner in which space is covered, that is either straight or curved or spiral. We have thus the *gomūtra cāli* indicating a curve, which is a floral pattern, or *sura cāli* indicating a crest and rough pattern of the waves of an ocean.

The primary *cālis* then evolve into units called *ṭopkās*. These may be identfied with the adavus or primary units of cadences of Bharatanāṭyam and other classical dance styles. The *ṭopkās* are both descriptive or imitative as also indicative of the path or nature of movement. By and large the *ṭopkās* of Seraikala may be equated to the *gatis* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*. Of the nine *ṭopkās*, five refer to the gaits or movements of animals and birds: a) *Bāgha dhumkā* (leap of a tiger), b) *Bāgh gati* (gait of a tiger), c) *Hasti gati* (gait of an elephant), d) *Mayura gati* (gait of a peacock) and e) *Haṁsa gati* (gait of a swan). Two refer to gods and demons: f) *Sura gati* (gait of a god) and g) *Kaṅsa gati* (gait of a demon). And finally, the remaining two refer only to the nature of the movement, that is, the waves of sea (*Sāgara gati*) and the swinging movement (Jhumaka).

It will be clear from the above that all these *ṭopkās* tell us of the intimate relationship of man, nature and animal and the desire of the artists to suggest movement which will evoke images of natural phenomenon and the world of animals and birds. Each of these *ṭopkās* or manner of walking is executed in three tempos, namely, slow or *vilambita*, medium or *madhya*, and fast or *druta*.

From these primary movements of the *ṭopkās* evolves the next basic unit called *ufli*, equivalent to the Sanskrit *upalaya*. As in the case of Mayurbhanj Chau, the *ufli* is derived from functions of daily life. It is interesting to note that in both styles greater attention is paid to the functions of mixing and spreading cowdung and preparing a mud-floor with it. These daily chores have been transformed into beautiful artistic pattens where the whole leg is used both to suggest these functions and to make complex patterns in space. The group of *uflis* which fall in the category are: *Gobargola, Ġutikuda, Cada dian* and *Jhoonti dia*. The next group comprises movements which revolve around agricultural functions and grain collecting. Among these the movements which revolve around paddy are the most important. Two *uflis* take their names and their movement pattern from these, namely *Dhānakuṭa* and Kulā *pāchuḍā* (winnowing). Others suggest cutting down shrubs and splitting a bamboo into two. Household chores and decorating oneself form the subject matter of another group. These might be identified as follows: *Pithou baṭā, Eḍimajā,* and *Snāna Sindoor-ṭikā*. The last category is reminiscent of the gaits we have spoken about earlier. These are: *Cheḷi diān*, *Hariṇa diān*, *Bāghā ṭopkā*, *Bāgha pāṇikhiā*. Finally, there is only one *ufli,* i.e. *Anṭāmoḍā*, which has a direct dramatic action and where killing or trampling is suggested.

It must be remembered that all these movement patterns evolve from the articulation of the lower limbs and are carried forward by the whole leg or only the calf. None of these functions or ideas are suggested through hand gesture or *hastābhinaya* characteristic of other dance styles. In the group of *uflis* which revolve around cowdung, its mixing,

etc., the toe is invariably stretched forward and there is an elevation of the knee to the waist level. Indeed the position so acquired recalls the movements of the *cāris* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra,* especially the *apakrānta*, *atikrānta* and svastika crossings. Leg extensions are also clear and many of these *uflis* result in a final position which can be identified as the *ālīḍha* or the *pratyālīḍha*, both poses recommended for those who have to depict fighting or sword-shield play on the stage. Besides these, there is also the extension of the leg and the elevation of the extended leg as in the *harin dian* or when a tiger is shown drinking water (*Bāgha pāṇipiā*). These leg extensions in Seraikala and in Mayurbhanj Chau are variations of the *vṛścika karaṇas* (scorpion legged movements) described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The *topkās*, the *uflis* and the primary *cālis* are then all combined together to form the cadence of movement known as the *bhaṇgī*. We must be very careful to distinguish the meaning of the word *bhaṇgī* in the context of the Chau forms from the *bhaṇgī* used in Orissi, Manipuri and other dance forms. In the Chau, the *bhaṇgī* is a cadence of movements, while in the case of the classical forms, especially Orissi, it is fundamental pose. At some point an inversion seems to have taken place between the words *cāli* and *bhaṇgī*.

The technique of the dance is built from these three constituents although it does not follow the typical cluster of movement pattern which we know in the classical forms, such as the *tukrā* of Kathak or the *tiramāṇams* of *Bharatanāṭyam*. It is true, however, that many cadences end in rhythmic triple, or quadriplex. In the *bhaṇgis* mime or *abhinaya* is attempted, though once again only through the articulation of legs and some position of the hands and not any facial movement. The names of the *bhaṇgīs* are suggestive. They are called *Sneha* (affection), *Lajja* (shyness), *Cānd Dekhā* (looking at the moon), *Viṣāda* (dejection), *Candramukha* (the face of the moon or the crescent of the moon). The torso and the extended arm movements suggest all these without the aid of words in music or gestures of hands.

This movement pattern is naturally then set to a rhythmic or metrical cycle or given a musical accompaniment. The metres or *tālas* used by the Seraikala Chau range from the normal *tintāla* to the 14-beat *ḍhamār* pattern. The mnemonics are played by the drum and each stroke represents a particular 'bol'. The musical accompaniment comprises four types of drums known as the *ḍhol*, the *dhumsā* and the *tikra* or the *nagārā*, As in the case of the Mayurbhanj Chau, there is the *mahūri*, a type of Shehnai or wind instrument, and now sometimes a harmonium is also used. The orchestra can be enlarged to include instruments like the *ghaṇṭa* and the *karatāla*. Often wind instruments such as the *raṇasiṇgha* and the *narasiṇgha* are also added.

Vocal accompaniment is minimal in all the Chaus but more so in Seraikala. The instrumental music dominates the music. Judging from the fact, however, that the musical compositions are attributed to eminent Oriya poets including Upenderbhañja, Kavi Sūrya, Udita Nārāyana and others, it would appear that the vocal accompaniment must have been essential at some point. The rich *sāhitya* gives place to repetitive melodic refrain. The *rāgas* used range from the simpler *deśī* such as *deśākhya asadsukla,*

to the very chiselled and sophisticated ones like *mālkauns, kedāra, bhairavī,* etc. The *tālas* are many, including *tintāla, dhamār,* etc. and are played with great skill and intricacy.

The repertoire of Seraikala Chau ranges from the epic themes to purely lyrical numbers which, at some stage or the other, must have had a poetic content. Both Purulia and Mayurbhanj Chau depend for their dramatic content on the epics. The Seraikala Chau draws upon these but extends it to themes which revolve around nature, birds, animals and purely interpretative and symbolic themes based on Indian myths and legends. Among the numbers which revolve around themes drawn from the epics and Purāṇas are the *Mahiṣasuramardinī, Duryodhana Urubhaṇga, Harapārvati, Ṛsyaśrṇga, Candrabhāgā,* etc. Each of these is an exercise in suggestiveness rather than in realism. The restraint employed in the execution and the slow, gradual buildup of the theme are in deep contrast to the dramatic power of the Purulia Chau. The numbers which revolve around nature, animals, birds are *Mayūranṛtya, Sarpanṛtya, Prajāpatinṛtya, Sāgaranṛtya,* etc. Functional numbers include poignant themes concerning lives of fishermen (*dhīvara*), boatman (*nāvika*), and each theme is treated symbolically. The *prajāpatinṛtya* and *Mayūranṛtya* are concerning a butterfly and a peacock respectively and representing different approaches to life. The dance of the *nāvika* or boatman with the perils of the sea is movingly beautiful and reminiscent of the Chinese Opera. There are also numbers having cosmographic themes such as the spheres and the relationship of the night with the morrow. One such number is *Candrabhāgā* telling the story of Candrabhāgā's love for the Sun god. Step by step, movement by movement, their relationship is built, until she plunges into the sea to meet her tragic end. The stylization which is achieved in these numbers speaks of a capacity for abstraction which makes the Seraikala Chau a highly sophisticated form with little or no resemblance to popular traditions of dance.

These moving themes are executed with a strange lyrical charm is never melodramatic, and the effectiveness of the total execution is due to a large extent to the justly famous masks of Seraikala. These are a class by themselves. Initially, they were perhaps prepared in earth or mud, later in wood. Presently they are made only of dark clay found near the Kharkai river. The clay model of the character whose mask is to be made is fixed to a wooden plank. A muslin cloth is then pasted on it and it is reinforced by layers of paper. The masks are not visualized realistically as in the case of those used in the Purulia Chau. They achieve distinctive stylization through rare suggestive power. The eyebrow, eyes, nose, mouth, lips—every single feature is painstakingly drawn and the pastel shades used attempt to preserve a lyrical mood. The secret of the suggestive power of these masks lies in the manner in which contours of the eyebrows, eyes, forehead, etc., are drawn. There is nothing dead or wooden about these masks and the wide range of characters which these masks can present is comparable only to one other South-East Asian tradition, i.e., the Indonesian Wayang Topeng. Nowhere else in India do we find a parallel tradition which is as sophisticated as this one. The masks are central to both the *abhinaya* or expression technique as also to the costuming and the coiffure. The costume

and the coiffure have many points of similarity with the other Chaus, particularly the Mayurbhanj Chau. The lower *dhotī* is common to the Mayurbhanj and the Seraikala Chau. The upper garment is, however, different because in most cases in the Seraikala Chau full-sleeved upper garment with rich adornments is worn. The headgears or crowns are not tinselled or heavy as in the Purulia Chau, but they are effective nevertheless.

VI

MAYURBHANJ CHAU

Mayurbhanj Chau, a parallel development, also presents many problems of classification in terms of categories of dance-drama forms. It is indeed a true indicator of the complex picture of the Indian performing arts. On one level the dance-drama form is considered rural, village-based and even tribal. On the other, it contains within itself many aspects of the epic traditions of India and thus shares elements of what may be termed as the main stream of Indian culture. Finally, in terms of dance technique it is stylized with a body of movement-vocabulary which is chiselled and abstract.

In our description and examination of the Mayurbhanj Chau we have attempted to look at the dance form from the outside as well as inside so as to identify the elements which go into the making of the form rather than dwell on a history which, alas, is either not known or certainly not well reconstructed from primary or secondary evidence.

Mayurbhanj Chau dance is prevalent in the South-eastern part of Orissa. Adjacent to the state of Mayurbhanj, lie the states of Seraikala and Purulia, today part of the states of Bihar and Bengal respectively. Within the region, there is a large variety of tribes who, in turn, share many common features with the tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. These tribes range from the Munda group to the Austric and the Indic, even if anthropologists differ on the classification.

Agriculturally, many of the tribes of the region are shift-cultivators and some are tool agriculturists. Many propitiation rites are common to this tribal group of people, and the agriculturists particularly have rites which revolve around the installation of a pole as a symbol of fertility. Many dances of the Hos and the Oraons are held at a place distant from their actual living area. Here the pole is installed before the Jhūm (shift-cultivating) rites where ceremonies begin.

Linguistically these tribes belong to the Muṇḍā group of languages and are inheritors of a non Indo-Aryan stream.

A close look at the community which performs the Mayurbhanj Chau dances shows that although the dance is an expression of a village culture, it has carried forward many purely tribal elements. We may identify one or two of these elements.

The group of people who perform the dances are almost without exception people of what we term in India as the backward classes. Among the categories listed in the Constitution are the Naṭs, the Bhāḍas, Bhūmiyās, Pāikas and others. Mayurbhanj Chau

is performed by the priests from amongst these. Herein lies a tell-tale key of the interaction between different levels of Indian society ranging from tribal to village to the high castes. In the propitiation rites connected with Mayurbhanj Chau there is one which revolves around the establishment of a pole at a place which should be a few miles away from the village.

Two occasions are considered appropriate for the dance. One is near Dussehra time (this was introduced some years ago) and the other at the *Caitra Parva*. For our purposes this second occasion is of great significance. We may remember that the *Caitra Parva* is celebrated throughout India as the great harvest festival. We see immediately two simultaneous levels of operation; the first a take over from the propitiation rites of the tribal groups on the occasion of shift cultivation and the other the rites and celebrations connected with agricultural harvest. On these two levels is superimposed a third one, for today the ritual comprises worship of Lord Śiva. It is important to note that there is no icon worship during the festival. The pole continues to represent Lord Śiva. The devotees are called *Bhaktas*, a word which also is often vulgarized as *Bhagatas*.

As in the case of Seraikala, persons enrolled as *Bhagatas* change their gotra for the duration of the festival. They all acquire the *Śiva gotra* for the period of the festival.

About 15 days before the *Caitra Parva* festival particular persons are enrolled for undergoing the ascetic practices connected with the ritual. They keep fast, take a ritual bath, visit the temple of Goddess Ambikā and then proceed to offer worship to Lord Śiva at the consecrated place. Is this not reminiscent vaguely of the Kāvādi and Kargam dances of South India? The ritual concludes in the *paṭa* ceremonies observed during the last four days preceding the *Caitra Saṅkrāti*. The *Bhaktas* are not ordinary people. After their initiation they have to perform a fire-walking ritual called the *niān paṭa*.

They perform another rite where the devotee is suspended by a foot on a pole over a flaming fire. This ritual is called *jhulā paṭa*. Finally, they hang in suspension by their arms while a pole makes a complete revolution on a T-shaped structure. There also is some walking on thorns. These and other ceremonies come only on the 26th day of the month of *Caitra* when a pitcher of water is brought out to herald the beginning of the festival.

The earthen pitcher is painted crimson with vermilion and is sanctified with *mantras*. The *ghaṭa* represents *Maha Śakti* and is called *Jātrā Ghaṭa*.

It is perhaps not necessary to dwell on the significance of these rituals which precede the dance festival. Here is an amalgam of ancient rites, fertility ritual, and deity worship. A dance emerging from this background would naturally not be termed as classical. However, even from this background could it be termed folk?

While we may not answer this question at this stage, let us now go on to the dance itself. On the first day of the festival which would roughly coincide with the last three days of the month of *Caitra* corresponding to April 11-12-13, the Chau dancers proceed not into the area where the ritual has been performed but at an actual temple of Bhairava. The teachers or the gurus of the dancers are not called gurus but are called *ustāds*. Obviously some syncretism has taken place. The *ustāds* and musicians worship Bhairava and also initiate new dancers on that date.

The initiation is done through tying a piece of red thread on the right wrist of every dancer. The ustāds and musicians are given new *dhotīs* to wear. The preliminaries over, the whole assembly performs the ritualistic *praṅāmic* dance. A characteristic feature of the dance is an offering of the leaves of wood apple and flowers mixed with the earth of the practising area of the dancers. All these are tied in a piece of red cloth which is kept inside a 19th century-built proscenium stage. Each dancer offers his *praṇāmas* to these articles which first were offered to the Lord Bhairava.

Without pausing to describe the performance of the Mayurbhanj Chau, let us speak at this stage of the other rituals connected with the performance. At the end of the festival, at midnight, another pitcher, this time called the *niśighaṭa* or the night pitcher, or sometimes also the *Kāmanā*, the desire *ghaṭa* is installed. In many ways this *ghaṭa* also represents *Śakti*. Another ritual connected with the dance is the offering of a specially prepared dance to the Sun God. This is performed some time during the festival. Perhaps it is pertinent to recall here that such worship is common to many tribes and villages as well as to the sophisticated, high class Brāhmins of Orissa. It would also be necessary to draw attention to the magnificent temple of Konarak dedicated to the Sun God. Co-existence of many layers of civilization and culture and multiplicity of meaning and symbolism is obvious. All these ceremonies have close affinities within all that we have described in the context of Seraikala but with vital differences.

Now to the dance itself. There are many ways in which we can analyse the form which is presented before and after the rituals described above. We can look at it from the outside to find out whether it has any relationship to other forms prevalent in the area or any connections with forms outside the region of Orissa. We can look at it also from the inside, that is, only from the point of view of movement and treatment of the human body which is the instrument of expression, again with a view to investigating these relationships and connections.

There is so far little known written history of Mayurbhanj Chau. There are also no texts. In short, from the outside it would appear that the form is purely *deśī*, folk or popular, dependent on oral traditions. However, a close look at the chronicles of the Kaliṅga kingdom and of their principalities tell us of a flourishing martial tradition where warriors called *Pāikas* were maintained in large numbers. We do learn of dance performances which may have been called Chau during Mansingha's visits to Bengal and Orissa. The sculptural tradition reinforces this evidence by the prolific depiction of war scenes, shield and sword play and acrobatics. This ranges from the reliefs of Khaṇdagiri and Udayagiri caves to the medieval monuments of Bhubaneswar and Konarak. Much later, in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, we come across the emergence of the scroll or *paṭa* painting tradition of Orissa. While the Kṛṣṇa theme dominates the content of these paintings there is evidence here also of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Many characteristic postures and stances of Mayurbhanj Chau have a close affinity with the stances and postures arrested in stone, line and colour in these reliefs and in these paintings. From the sculptural and painting evidence, it would appear that the Mayurbhanj Chau dancers were not unaware of the principles of the treatment of the human form, as

it is known to the sculptors of the temple traditions. In content also the Mayurbhanj Chau incorporates themes drawn from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and dances revolving around Śiva and Kṛṣṇa. In addition, there are dances which definitely depict only martial drill. These include numbers like the *astra daṇḍa*. Besides the above themes there are also others which revolve around everyday life, such as the hunter dances and the trick dances using poles, ropes and pots.

The occasion and themes of the dances and the postures and stances clearly establish the relationship of Mayurbhanj Chau to dance prevalent in the regions of Seraikala and Purulia, and speak of a multi-layering of many diverse strands. They also establish the relationship of Chau with other dance-drama forms of India particularly the Jātrā of Orissa and Bengal. A very distant similarity of narrative and dramatic structure can also be seen with some forms of the Andhra Pradesh and the Karnataka regions.

This external evidence has to be correlated with the actual techniques of the dance. Once we enter into the dance style itself, we find that it has shed almost all features of tribal, folk and village dance and has acquired a distinctive stylization which is a characteristic feature of the dance forms commonly termed as 'classical'. The normal yardsticks of identifying a dance form as classical have been the existence or non-existence of a rich body of composed poetry, namely the *sāhitya*. A second yardstick has been the existence or non-existence of a musical composition which is based on this *sāhitya* and set to a *rāga* system. A third criterion has been the existence or non-existence of a complex system of mnemonics set to a particular metrical system, namely the *tāla*. The fourth criterion has been the existence or non-existence of a self-imposed limitation of movement in relationship to space. Finally, there is the last touchstone of the relationship of the word to the note, of the word and note to the rhythm, and of the word, the note and the rhythm to the gesture. The Mayurbhanj Chau can be analysed from all these points of view and also from the point of view of its own distinctive principles of movement, and whether or not it responds to any one of the criteria mentioned above, particularly to the criterion relating to principles and conventions of improvisation.

The dance begins with Raṅgabājā. This is performed behind the screen: it is essentially a musical invocation, almost reminiscent of the *Pūrvaraṅga* and the *Pūruvapāda* of Kathākali. This is followed by the instrumentalists playing a tune following which the different characters appear on the stage. This phase is known as the *Cāli*, literally meaning 'walking.' The characters appear in their different *dharaṇas* or stances. The particular stances and gaits establish the character without the aid of masks in contrast to the other forms of Chau, namely the Seraikala and the Purulia Chau. After the Raṅgabājā and before the opening of the actual drama, there is the appearance of two characters called *Kāji-Pāji*. The dialogue between the two which is an amalgam of dialogue, mime and movement is called the *Vidūṣaka praṇālikā*, again reminding us of the *naṭa-naṭi*, *sūtradhāra* and *naṭī* of the Sanskrit theatre, as well as of the *Vidūṣaka* of other forms.

The *nāc* begins after the characters have appeared in their specific *dharaṇa*. The word *nāc* is obviously derived from *nṛtta*: in this portion there is the introduction of

theme but little dramatic action or taking forward of the story. The dance content of the dance style is contained for the most part in this section of the dance. *Nāṭakī* is the final phase performed to an accelerated tempo, where the dramatic action is heightened. Although there is some vocal accompaniment, *sāhitya* is very thin and minimal: the dance-drama is presented in the main to the accompaniment of a wind instrument called the *Mahūri*, a type of *Śehnāi*, and a *Teula*, a string instrument, and to a variety of percussion instruments such as the *Ḍhol*, the *Cāditiadi* (a short cylindrical drum played with two blunt and heavy sticks). The *ḍhol* leads the drums: the melody is played by the *mahūri* and the *teula*, and sometimes also by a bamboo flute. The tunes played by these instruments have a great deal in common with the folk songs. Some *rāgas* and *rāginīs* of Hindustani classical music can also be discerned. Mayurbhanj artists claim 36 *rāginīs*. However, there is no word-note or its precise synchronisation with the basic *tāla*, as in the classical forms. There is only a general type of relationship among the sung or played melody, the *tāla* and the dancers' gestures. There is, however, great complexity in the playing of the percussion instruments. There is a system of *tāla* and of *bols* (mnemonics) which are interpreted and presented by the dancer. There is also counterpointing between the rhythmic syllables of the *ḍhol* and the *cadcadi*.

The dance itself like the Seraikala Chau can be broken up into the *ṭopkās*, the *uflis* and the *bhangīs*. Like other classical styles of India, Mayurbhanj Chau begins with two basic stances or postures. These postures are quite distinctive but have a strong affinity with the stances of the sophisticated Orissi. Bharatanāṭyam can be understood as a rhombus or a series of triangles in space, Kathākali as a square or rectangle, Maṇipuri as a figure of eight, Kathak as a straight line, and Orissi as a *tribhaṇga*. Mayurbhanj Chau, in contrast, has an open *tribhaṅga* and *cauka* (akin to an open *grand plié*) as a basic motif. While in the *cauka* the weight of the body is equally divided, along a central median (the *madhya sūtra*), in the *tribhaṅga* it is unequally divided and there are three distinct deviations from the central median. All *ṭopkās*, *uflis*, and *bhangīs* emerge from these two basic stances. The affinity between the Orissi and Mayurbhanj Chau is closest here; however the manner of building up a movement greatly varies. All the units of movements are again classified from the point of view of the nature of the movement, namely, strong, precise, quick, terse, cutting and fluid, liquid and elastic. These are known by expressive terms such as the *Hathiyār dharā* (holding of weapons), *Kalikaṭa* (to cut with a weapon the softest end of a sprig), and *Kalibhāngā* (*Kali,* softest end of a sprig; *bhaṇga*, bending, etc.). The first denotes stances and open positions, the second the nature of terse or cutting movement with abrupt stops, and the third the fluid torso movements. One group of movements can be distinguished from another, even if they are poised in a different order. While no parallels in terms of *tāṇḍava* and *lāsya* can be discerned, it may not be too far-fetched to see that *Hathiyār-dharā* and *Kalikaṭā* suggest *tāṇḍava* movements and *Kalibhāngā* those relating to *lāsya*.

Thus there is *nṛtta, nṛtya* and *nāṭya* and *tāṇḍava* and *lāsya*. The torso is used in synchronisation and in counter-opposition to the movements of the lower limbs. The leg movements are more definite and are broken up into distinct categories judging from

their names. Some indicate the path of movement and others the particular section of the lower limb, such as the foot, the ankles and the toes. Many *uflis* derive their names from the functions of an Oriya housewife: the way she prepares the mud-house floor and decorates it herself. These include *Gobar-Kūdhā* (picking cow-dung from the floor), *Gobargoḷā* (mixing cow-dung in water), *Cadadia* (spreading the cow-dung mixture on the courtyard) *Cinerā* (scraping the earth), *Kharkā* (sweeping the floor with a broom), and *Jhūntidiā* (decorating the floor with rice paste as in *alpanā*).

There are others which take their name from the household chores, such as *Bāsan-mājā* (cleansing utensils), *Haḷadi baṭā* (grinding turmeric on a stone slab), *Dhāna kūtā* (pounding paddy) and *Dhāna Pāchuḍā* (winnowing the husked rice). Some others relate only to toilet, such as *Gādhuā* (pouring water on the body), Mathājhaḍa (after the bath, drying the long hair by a jerky movement of the towel), *Munhapochā* (wiping the face with a towel), *Sintāphadā* (parting the hair with a comb), *Sindūra pindhā* (putting a dot of vermilion on the forehead), *Jhūntiā majā* (cleansing the ring), *Uḍhūni chātā* (putting a dot of vermilion on the forehead), *Uḍhūni chātā* (putting the two ends of a scarf over the shoulders), *Chalka* (walking with ecstasy) and *Thamkā* (walking in a lyrical vein). Yet a few others suggest functions or operations such as Kantaka (cutting down the thorny shrubs), *Kaṇṭā-nikā* (removing the thorns from the paths) and *Bāunsacirā* (splitting a bamboo in two). There are still others which represent martial movement, such as *Antemodā* (to kill by trampling on the abdomen), *Khaṇḍā haṇa* (sometimes also called *Jitāhaṇa*, implying killing with a sword,) *Hābsa* (to kill with a heavy instrument and *Uskā jankā* (to lift up and then press hard).

Lastly, there is a group suggesting the gaits of animals: *Hariṇa dian* (leaping gait of a deer), *Śaula dian* (a fish jerking out of water), *Baga ṭopkā* (a crane stalking), *Baga Mācha khojā* (a crane searching for a fish), *Mankaḍciti* (a monkey somersaulting), *Hanumān-pāṇikhiā* (a monkey drinking water), *Bāgha-paṇikhiā* (a tiger drinking water), *Ciṅgḍicitika* (jerks of a prawns when pulled out of water) and *Cheḷidian* (a goat jumping).

It will be obvious from the groupings of these *uflis* that they can be such as to incorporate agricultural functions, daily life routine, war-drill and animal gaits. Besides, there are those involving the walking of humans and some emotions. Again layers of artistry from pure representation to abstraction are seen. When analysed from the point of view of movement, one finds that these *uflis* are reminiscent of the *Cāris*, *Baumis* and *akāṣaki* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, some *sthānas* (such as the *maṇḍalasthāna*) and the spiral category of *Karaṇas* described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as the *Vṛścika Karaṇa*. The last two are most significant and characteristic of the Mayurbhanj Chau.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions a category of *Karaṇas* called the *Vṛścika*. The *Vṛścika Karaṇas* as their name denotes are suggestive of the scorpion legged: they are varied such as the *Vṛścika latā*, *Vṛścika ūrdhva latā* and many others. They are found on the walls of many temples. They are captured in stone in India from the earliest times, beginning with the *Khaṇḍagiri vidyādhara*. This is followed by the flying gandharvas on the stupas of Sanchi, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Deogarh, Ellora, Ajanta; on the

medieval monuments of Virupakasa, Khajuraho, Bhubaneswar, Konarak; on the Southern monuments of Mamallampuram, Halebid, Tanjore, Kumbhakonam, Chidambaram. We see these dance poses depicting this extended leg and suggesting an elevation of the lower limb, a feature which is today almost non-existent in many classical dance styles.

The Mayurbhanj Chau emphasizes this movement more than any other dance style in India and achieves a classical perfection distinctive to it. Without using a śāstric terminology the dance style incorporates many elements of high classicality.

The repertoire of the dance style is also revealing. It extends from simple themes, such as hunting and fishing, as in the dances known as the *Śabar Ṭokā* (Śikarī), to animal dances like the *Jambuvana nṛtya* or those which revolve round nature such as *Mali Phula* or deities like Pavana Putra Hanumān, Naṭarāja, Paraśurāma. Hindu myth and legend are equally manifested in the dance-dramas, such as *Tāmuḍia* Kṛṣṇa, *Garuḍa Vāhana, Kailāsa, Samudramanthana, Ahalyā Uddhāra* and *Gitā Upadeśa*. The performance is always presented by two groups, namely the Uttara Sahi and the *Dakshina Sahi*.

The tradition has been maintained by the Ustāds, whose genealogies can be traced back to 200 years or more. The genealogies of the princely states who patronized the arts can also be traced back to a few generations.

We have here thus a complex phenomenon where tribal, village and urban culture, the *mārgī* and the *deśī*, the *Nāṭyadharmī* and *Lokadharmī* have come together to make a new whole. Many moments of historical past coexist and many process of acculturation and assimilation are in evidence. It will be clear from this brief analysis that while in socio-economic terms the form is rural or folk, in artistic terms it is classical. It responds to all the criteria enumerated except for the absence of *sāhitya*.

Here then is the problem before us that certain forms cannot be categorised as the purely *mārgī* or *deśī* or *śāstric* or *prayoga* exclusively, if adjudged from the point of view of only one yardstick of either *sāhitya svara*, or the *bhaṇga* or *tāla*. All factors—racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural—and those relating to the content and form of the particular style have to be taken together for a meaningful understanding of the Indian cultural pattern.

We had begun by saying that this dance style presented difficulties of classification. Our analysis will have shown, it is hoped, the interconnections between this dance style and others in adjacent areas like the Seraikala Chau and the Purulia Chau. From the point of view of internal technique it shares many technical features with Orissi. Thus, as in life, the dance form also presents in a very significant manner a distinctive form, which has connections both with genres in the region and those outside it.

VII

PURULIA CHAU

Mayurbhanj Chau of Orissa and Seraikala Chau of Bihar are related to each other in the matter of movements and dance technique, while Purulia Chau of Bengal presents another facet of an allied tradition. The latter, while embodying a martial grandeur and an epic style reminiscent of Mayurbhanj Chau, is a masked dance-drama form like Seraikala Chau.

Like Mayurbhanj and Seraikala Chau, it is characterised by a paucity of literary source material so necessary for an understanding of theatre and dance-drama forms of India. In this respect these three forms form a group together: they are indicative of the phenomenon of the epic-content travelling to village and tribal societies with a minimal penetration of the literary word and a structured poetic form. While the themes are from the epics and the Purānas and sometimes even the *Kāvyas,* the recitative word and sung poetry, as an essential ingredient, appear to assume a subsidiary role.

Unlike Seraikala Chau Purulia Chau is not performed by princes. It is instead the preserve of a group of people who are categorised as the depressed classes in socio-economic terms. Today they are either villagers, farmers, agriculturists or even labourers or rickshaw pullers.

But all is not said in calling them the depressed classes and the rickshaw pullers of today: they are the repositories of a rich and developed tradition of dance and drama. We have thus once again to look at the spatial and the temporal situation which accounts for the high sophistication of the form and the plurality of historical forces which have gone into the making of this form. Like Mayurbhanj Chau, it is popular and folk from the outside, and chiselled structured from the inside.

The physio-geographical or ecological features of the area known as Purulia themselves provide clues for identifying affinities with adjacent areas as also elements of distinctiveness. The political unit called Purulia was made into a district only in 1956. The 2,000 odd square miles is surrounded by Bihar in the north, west and south and by Bengal in the east. Purulia was a part of the Manbhum sub-division originally attached to Bengal and later to the States of Bihar and Orissa. The division of Manbhum resulted in the formation of Purulia in Bengal and Dhanbad in Bihar. The land is uncultivable, barren and hilly for the most part. Rainfall is scarce and rice is the main crop in areas where cultivation is possible.

It is inhabited by many scheduled castes and tribes found in the eastern zone of India. The most important amongst these are the Bhumij, the Mura, the Santhals and the Kurmis. Hindu castes have migrated here from neighbouring regions, they constitute however the minority and not the majority of the population. Towns are few and far between, over 2,000 villages make this complex.

The Bhumij, an Austric speaking group, comprises a large section of the population: they claim to be the original inhabitants of the area. There may or may not be truth in this statement, but it is true that it was from amongst the Bhumij that arose a class of feudal chiefs and rulers who ultimately called themselves Rājās and Kṣatriyas. Some of them were influenced by the main trends of Hinduism, and were also builders of temples and shrines, nevertheless, the community continued to have dialogue with the agriculturists and also subscribed to the faiths and beliefs of their ancestors. This phenomenon of overlayering can be noticed in other parts of India, particularly Manipur, where the earlier pre-*Vaiṣṇava* culture of the Meiteis coexists even after the overwhelmingly pervasive transformation of the society into a *Vaiṣṇava* culture. Purulia Chau is particularly popular amongst the Bhumij and Chau parties are organised by the whole village and all sections of the population take part.

The Muras are sometimes called Mundas. They are another important community of the region. They were also early settlers. They assume a superior status on account of their taking on the role of being priests of the community. The Muras worship the sun in the same fashion as the inhabitants of Mayurbhanj. In the context of the latter, we observed that the sun-worship of the tribes was accepted by the rulers of the region until it culminated into the mighty redifice of the sun-temple of Konarak. Amongst the Muras, the sun is known as the *Siṅga Baṅga,* amongst the Bhumij he becomes *Dharam.* Alongside penetrate the stories of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata,* which are narrated, sung and danced. As in society, so also in the dance, the performers are the Bhumij; the teachers of the dance are Muras, they are traditionally called the ustads, a word which must have been adopted by them fairly recently. It is not unlikely that they were the original teacher-trainers of the temple dancers, and in time when their association with the temples disappeared, they continued to be the teachers of Purulia Chau to boys and men.

The Kurmis constitute yet another group. They too adopted certain Hindu customs and ritual, but under the thin veneer of Hinduism lies the vast body of local myth and legend and a variety of faiths, often termed as 'animistic' by anthropologists.

The fourth and last group is that of the Doms, again divided into the Bengali and the Bihari Dom. The Bengali Doms are the hereditary musicians of Purulia Chau. The history of the Doms can be traced back to the 9th century. While chronicle evidence is scarce between the 9th and 11th centuries, there is ample evidence from the 12th century onwards to show that they were soldiers and warriors. The playing of the drum was possibly a martial vocation which was then transferred to the sphere of theatre. We have noticed a similar phenomenon in the context of Mayurbhanj and the relationship of the dancers to the local militia set-up, called the Pāikas.

While the Bhumij and the Mura are agriculturists in part, the Doms are landless and they live either through the vocation of music or basket making. Thus, we have the Bajania and the Ankuria Doms. This ethnic multiplicity and the distinctive roles ascribed to each group in the context of dance will, it is hoped, make it evident that in a scheduled caste-tribe society specific functions are related to particular communities. The theatrical experience provides the opportunity for dialogue and communication amongst these sub-groups.

The history of the region or its association with the other streams of Indian culture is difficult to reconstruct, but there are certain significant landmarks which must be mentioned. Some historians believe that the Jaina Tirthatikara Mahavira preached in the region in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. While it is true that Jainism seems to have been known to the area early, there is no conclusive evidence of the same. Buddhism and Hinduism were also known to the area between the 2nd century A.D. and the 12th century A.D. There are many scattered architectural and sculptural remains to prove this, vaisnavism also left its impact in the post-15th century and more especially in the 17th century A.D. This is contemporaneous with the enthusiastic practice of vaisnavism in the adjoining state of Birbhum in Bengal.

It is likely that Chau of Purulia came into existence as a result of the interaction between the earlier cultures and the advent of vaisnavism. In content, the stories of the epics were adopted, the form of singing continued to be the Jhumar, a melody used for ritual singing of the tribal and rural community. This again is a typical cultural pattern in the 'village-cultures'– while the form has remained old, new content has been instilled into it. The communities continue to perform other dances and sing songs which go back to purely regional or local roots. In this respect also, they follow the pattern of other parts of India. There are for example the ritual songs and dances which are performed only by women, the *nacnis* or *khemti*, there are others which revolve around the agricultural cycle and are closely interwoven with sowing, harvesting etc. Tusu is performed during the harvesting, so is Sarkul. Joiya is performed during the monsoon at the time of transplantation. There are other songs and dances which are closely related to vocations, such as the Ahira song of the cattle breeders and Katti of the warriors. A folk drama form called Krsna Jatra is also known. Thus here too, the four levels of ritual, agricultural, functional and pure professional are seen.

Purulia Chau has to be understood thus against this background of the socio-cultural history of the different groups of people who reside in the region.

The feudal chiefs of Mayurbhanj, Seraikala and even Purulia have sustained these forms during the last couple of centuries. The feudal lordship however was very short lived in Purulia and thus the form today is practised only by those who are termed as the depressed classes. In some ways we are very far from the literary drama of the Brahmins of the *Kuṭiyaṭṭam*, Bhāgavatamelā and Yakṣagāna. In other ways Purulia and Mayurbhanj Chau are close parallels. From the contemporary spatial situation and the meagre evidence of historical developments, it may not be incorrect to conclude that many elements of the Sanskrit tradition survive not only at the rural but also tribal levels.

They were fostered by the community. Also what appears to be a tradition of the illiterate masses may well have been a classical tradition once.

Like Mayurbhanj and Seraikala Chau and dance-drama forms like the Yakṣagāna, Purulia Chau is also an open-air performance. There is no raised platform and only an open area of 20 ft. by 20 ft. is enclosed with a narrow five feet passage for exits and entrances. It has a length which varies from 15 to 20 ft. The 20' x 20' area serves the purpose of the acting arena.

The dancing enclosure is circular in shape, the diameter works out to about 20 ft., the musicians sit together on one side. If there is more than one party performing, each group has its own musicians who sit next to the performers. We had noticed both in the context of Mayurbhanj Chau and Yakṣagāna that it is common to see a number of groups perform together or sequentially, one after the other.

The audience sits on three sides of the acting area on the ground. Only for the women spectators raised platforms are constructed on the sides.

The performance begins at night, 9 or 10 p.m., as in other parts of India. There seems to be few pre-performance rituals of the installation of the pole or the *Jātrāghaṭa* or the *Niśighaṭa* as in the case of the other two Chaus. Since it is also performed in the month of *Vaiśikha* it is unlikely that these were unknown, possibly they have been given up during the last decade.

The performance begins as in other dance-drama forms with the entry of the musicians, mainly the drummer, who displays his skill through pure percussion and rhythmic reciting of the mnemonics. This is followed by the entry of an actor who wears the mask of Gaṇeśa and appears at the far end of the narrow corridor. Attention to the character is immediately drawn as soon as the drummer pauses briefly and the vocalist takes on. The latter sings an invocation to Gaṇeśa. The actor who plays the part of Gaṇeśa not only wears a mask but also displays an extra pair of artificial wooden arms which are tied to his back and which represent Gaṇeśa as a four-armed deity. The wooden arms are rather clumsily tied at the back and there is no articulation of these artificial pair of arms. While the invocation is being sung by the musician, the actor-dancer takes a long pause, as if to establish his identity and to heighten expectation of the audience. In a flash thereafter, he runs to the acting area and begins to dance in a fast tempo. The singing of the Ganesa invocation is performed in the manner of a Jhumar.

The entry of Gaṇeśa is the beginning of the dramatic episode. The story then moves forward swiftly with the quick entries and exits of other characters, each taking a minute or two before he actually enters the arena. The stances, the mannered walks and gaits witnessed in the context of the other Chaus are also in evidence here. Seemingly unsophisticated, this introduction is a very distant counterpart of the *nirvāhaṇa* of the Southern schools and the Sanskrit tradition. Also like the Bhāgavata, the vocalist introduces each character through the singing of a couplet or two, but soon gives up, as his voice is drowned in the loud wind instruments and the louder drumming. The singer continues, nevertheless, to play the very important role of introducing the character, of narrating the scene and of interlinking one episode with another. The instrumental music

mostly repetitive in character accompanies the dramatic action throughout. As the theme develops, dramatic action heightens and the audience is spellbound in thrill and excitement. It responds through cries of 'chau' 'chau' etc.

Lighting was also originally provided by mobile light men who carried flaming torches on their heads and accompanied the dancers. Today kerosene and flat petromax is being used. Naturally, some of the magic of the drama, the flashing of crowns and the wielding of swords to subdued lighting is lost in flat overall lighting. The performance goes on until the early hours of the morning when it concludes with a fight between the hero and the demon and good triumphing over evil. If the whole story does not conclude on one day, it is continued on successive nights.

Sometimes one group alone presents the performance; at others two or three present it simultaneously as if in competition; and yet at others, one group follows the first and so on.

Although there is in fact only one identifiable form of Purulia Chau there are some sub-divisions as in the different schools of Kathākali and Yakṣagāna etc. Broadly speaking, there is the Bandyoyan, Bāgmundi, and Jhalda schools of Purulia Chau, each taking its name from the particular region. Today while Bandyoyan has remained the most conservative, Jhalda is the most influenced by urban cinema culture. The Bāgmundi group has received attention of art historians like Dr. Asuhotosh Bhattacharya, Milana Salvini etc. The troupe has been presented in Delhi and has also travelled abroad when it was presented at the Theatre des Nations festival, Paris.

The repertoire of Purulia Chau depends mostly for its content for the most part on the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and some episodes from the Purāṇias. The version of the Rāmāyaṇa followed however is that of *Kṛttivāsa*, written in the 16th and 17th centuries and not that of Vālmīki. It is significant that Tulasi or the Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa are more closely followed in some parts of India. Vālmīki seems to provide only the peg of the story. As in Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, here also there are many significant departures from Vālmīki. Few theatre versions of the Rāmāyaṇa begin with the killing of the young ascetic Sindhu by the King Dasaratha. Purulia Chau pays great importance to this episode. Also sequences where Rama meets Guhāka and other lowly people are emphasised. The epic is presented sometimes during the course of one night, at other times in three or four nights successively. The values of regional culture are in evidence in choice of theme, episodes and treatment. A near full *Mahābhārata* is also performed similarly, but obviously by selecting only certain episodes. The *Vanaparva* is more important than the beginning. The last battle is dramatically presented. The episode of Abhimanyu is easily the *piece de resistance*, where a young Abhimanyu fights valiantly his powerful foes. The concentric circles, the clockwise and anti-clockwise movements, the sharp jerks and turn of the neck and the torso, all put together create a spectacle of drama of the highest order.

Besides the epics, stories of the Purāṇas and many short numbers constitute the repertoire of Purulia Chau. It will be observed that while the content has much in common with the themes of Mayurbhanj Chau, there are few affinities with Seraikala

Chau. Like other dance-drama forms, no women take part, although of late in Jhalda school, as Dr. A. Bhattacharya tells us, some women are appearing taking their sanction from the Khemṭi tradition of temple dancers, but they "seem more like crude versions of cinema heroines". This new process of acculturation which manifests indiscrimination and incongruity is a modern phenomenon which so far has not shown any positive artistic innovations.

As has been pointed out earlier, the literary piece, the poetic word, plays comparatively an unimportant part in these styles. The couplets sung as the Jhumar only interlinking passages. The relationship of word and sound and gesture so characteristic of South Indian forms is almost absent. In this respect the form is more rural-village and perhaps this accounts for its being termed only a folk theatre. Nevertheless, the structure of the dance-drama has all the features of fully structured theatre.

The melodic vocabulary is limited. Five-note melodies are common, only occasionally seven-note melodies are introduced. The connection with Hindustani music is minimal. The musical orchestra consists of one melody and two percussion instruments. The melody is played on the sehnai (quite different from the śhehnāi of Hindustani classical music) and two drums, one *ḍhol* two-headed barrel shaped drum, and the other called *dhumsa,* a kettle drum made of single piece of wood or from metal plating. Sometimes more than one musician of each instrument comprise the orchestra. While the *dhumsa* player sits on the ground, the *śehnāi* player stands, the *ḍhol* player is a category apart, for he conducts the performance, plays the same role as the Bhāgavatar in the Yākṣagāna. He goes out to meet the character, accompanies him, guides him, stops him and even directs the floor patterns he must cover. The last is an excellent device specially for these masked dancers whose vision is limited and they would easily trip, were it not for the help and assistance of the drum player through his sounds and rhythmic patterns. We have already drawn attention to the role of the vocalist. The rhythmic structure is complex, and although no parallels can be discerned when compared to the *tālas* of Hindustani/Karnātaka system, it is observed that many intricate symmetrical/asymmetrical patterns are played. Sometimes, there are as many as 43 beats to a metrical cycle. At other times, it is 15 beats, or 8 beats to a cycle. Although there are some pauses, silences, quarter beats and in-beats, off beats are innumerable. Indeed many drummers of other schools find it very difficult to discern the rhythmic structure of the percussion instruments of Purulia Chau. Further complexity is added into the playing, by the *dhumsa* and the *ḍhol* executing cross rhythms. While one plays many regular rhythms, the other follows a distinct irregular pattern: symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns are common.

The dance technique of the style has some common features with the other Chau forms, but on the whole it has a distinctive movement articulation methodology, which is highly structured and rigorous.

Amongst the static position, the open 'grand demi plié' is common to Mayurbhanj Chau and Purulia Chau. Many entry stances or holding of weapons are similar. But affinities between the two almost end here. A general impression of martial quality is all that can be said to be similar. Then follow the gaits of different characters: they require

the same marked mannerism of different gaits of the characters of Yakṣagāna. There are the entries of the heroes, the gods, the aborigines, the demons, the animals, the birds. Each has his or her or its stance and the gait which are the *sthānas* and *maṇḍalas* and *gatis* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The animals crawl on all fours more realistically than in any other dance style, the birds leap and jump. All parts of the body are used. While noble men and gods stand and hold their torso erect and walk with long diagonal strides, the demons are stiff and arrogant. Hunters walk obliquely and stealthily to catch prey. However, one can identify different units of movements which are akin to the *uflis* and *topkās* of the other two Chaus. There is the walk on the knees, pirouetting on the knees, a movement not found in the other Chaus, but found in the *mundi* movement of Yakṣagāna. Besides, there are the rippling movement of the fish, the gliding movement of the swan, the crawling of the tortoise and wavy and diving movements which are akin to the *uskā* and *dubā* of Mayurbhanj Chau. Also, a minimum of hand gestures are used: expression is achieved through the total body movement or movement of the legs, again a feature which links the three Chaus together. From the *gatis* or gaits develop units of movement associated with particular characters. These include movements which are particular to Gaṇeśa, Durgā, Śiva, Paraśurāma, Hanumān, Arjuna, etc. Movements which exhibit function form another group; attack and defence movements are very many. These are used most effectively in dramatic climaxes like the last fight of Rāma and Rāvaṇa, the last fight of Abhimanyu, etc. Many pirouettes, rotations are known, and jumps and leaps are the most outstanding characteristic features of the style. Breath-taking leaps and jumps where the actor ends on the ground on his knees is a unique feature of this dance-drama style. The manipulation of the upper torso and the articulation of lower limbs is quite different in this style from what we had noticed in Mayurbhanj Chau. While Mayurbhanj Chau rests for its kinetic communication on leg extensions and effective knee-bends, Purulia Chau uses spread out knee positions, the 'cauka' and high jumps, and leaps in the air to create a sense of dynamism. All this put together in an atmosphere of half-lighting, with the quivering of the tinsel on crowns, creates an other-wordly effect. The shine of the masks and glittering of the crowns is in deep contrast to the costumes, which often merge into the foliage. Often one is aware only of a mask appearing as if from nowhere in space.

There are a few micro-movements of either the hands or the face or the neck; nevertheless, there are two movements which have a great delicacy and are a foil to the broad effects which are created by the leaps and jumps. There is, for example, a movement of the head which is controlled and delicate, it is a lateral movement of the neck and the head when other parts of the body are deliberately static and almost stiff. The dancer-actor almost seems to freeze the rest of his body in complete immobility and only particular neck and head movement is used most effectively to create moments of pathos and stillness. Indeed, scholars and art critics have tried to establish affinities between Purulia Chau and the dancers of Bali only on account of this one single movement. This is of course a little far-fetched because there is hardly anything else which is in common between the two dance traditions. There is one other movement

which is of significance in the same manner as that of the head and this is the movement of the shoulders where also there is a very controlled shaking achieved by articulating the ball and socket joint of the shoulder. The chest is also occasionally used where instead of an erect stiff torso there is a frontal backward movement in quick succession which communicates the emotion of agitation. The movement begins from the lower portion of the rib box and is carried upwards to the chest. All these movements are distinctive to Purulia Chau and are unknown in the vocabulary of other dance forms in India. Mayurbhanj Chau and Seraikala Chau use a chest and torso movement through a deep intake of breath and by employing the torso as a screw. The effect is very close to the contractions and releases of the Maratha Graham school of modern dance. The Purulia Chau has none of this. Instead, all its movements are in quick jerks, trembles or diagonal movements.

No account of this style would be complete without reference to a distinctiveness achieved in the masks. As has been mentioned earlier, both Seraikala and Purulia Chau use masks while the Mayurbhanj Chau is an unmasked dance-drama. Techniques of making of masks, the ways of wearing them and the character types which are used in these divergent forms are quite different. The Seraikala masks are smooth, stylised, courtly and have a refinement which speaks perhaps of the socio-economic milieu in which the dance style flourished. There are no lines or wrinkles on the face; only a smooth contour is drawn. The eyes are expressive, but are never drawn realistically; the same is true of the other features. The colour symbolism is evident from the use of pastel shades.

In Purulia Chau we encounter a totally different psychical approach to the same characters. These are vital beings, sometimes in raw masculinity with no lyricism or seerming refinement. The masks are worn close to the face. They are not oversized, indeed they almost seem a size smaller but they are strangely realistic in their fierceness, complete with moustaches, teeth, hair, lines on chin, lines on forehead and the rest. The mask of Rāvaṇa is made by ten heads arranged horizontally. It requires indeed great strength and balance for a dancer to go through the leaps and jumps with a mask of this kind on his face and a crown on the head which is almost heavier. Similarly, Kumbhakarna's mask is truly demonic, profane, profuse with hair, snarling mouth, beard etc. Although the make-up of Yakṣagāna demon or a *bhūta* of the Mysore tradition is equally fearsome, there is something which is almost primeval about the masks of Purulia when compared to the make-up techniques of the South Indian dance forms. Naturally, the masks of Rāma, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are placid and quiet. Here also there is no use of light, soothing pastel shades. Rāma, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are all seen in royal blue: here is a marked difference between the colour symbolism used in South India and Eastern India, particularly in Purulia Chau. It will be recalled that in practically all kinds of the Southern dance forms, green or 'paccai' is associated with noble men or the *dhīrodātta* heroes. Here, blue becomes the basic colour possibly on account of the underlying assumption that blue was the colour of Viṣṇu. Śiva wears a white mask. He has realistic coil of hair, a more realistic coil of snake and the only apparel worn is the

deer skin. It is interesting to note that although the gods and goddesses, demons and deities, noble heroes and warriors are the same in different parts of India, their treatment in each of the regions speaks of a distinctive regional interpretation and thus a world view which is consanguine but not identical. The women characters, as in all other dance dramas, are presented naturally and sometimes they have only make-up and do not wear masks. These follow the same conventions as character-types known as in Kathākali.

Almost unique to Purulia Chau is another group of masks; these are the masks of the birds and the animals. In most other dance-drama forms of India, masks of animals and birds or anthropomorphic deities are restricted to the face or the head. In Purulia Chau animals and birds are shown through a complete masking of the body. Thus for example, there is the Varāha or the boar *avatāra*. He enters not through a mask of the boar only on the face, but is instead a dancer walking on all fours with a skin of the boar on his back. The other mythical animals, specially the snake and the tortoise, are represented by characters, who crawl on the ground not only on all fours but on their abdomens if necessary. The birds are also shown with a pair of wings, a head and face mask and costume which represents the body of the bird. In this respect Purulia Chau contains a tradition which seems to have died down in other parts of India. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* devotes one complete chapter to the representation of animals and birds on the stage through masks and skins in the *Lokadharmī* traditions. What we see today in Purulia is perhaps the continuity of the tradition mentioned by Bharata.

As in stances, entries and gaits, here also a stylisation and a mannerism can be detected in the matter of these masks and the crowns which are worn by the actors. Seraikala Chau has a variety of masks and many character types, but there are no large crowns or headgears. In Purulia Chau different crowns are worn by different characters. Although these crowns do not have the intricacy and complexity of the *muḍḍis* of Yakṣagāna or Kathākali, they have their own distinctive variety and intricacy. On a basic framework, pieces of artificial tinsel, pearls, ribbons and the rest are stuck in different designs in different characters. The trembling movements to which we have referred earlier, when used with these crowns in the half-lighting, produce a fantastic effect of light and shade and the actor invariably uses it for highly dramatic purpose.

We had already referred to the class structure, the Bhumij and the Muras who perform Purulia Chau and the Doms who are the hereditary musicians. The mask-makers of Purulia Chau also belong to a very special community near the village of Bagmudi. The village is called Chordia or Chorda. While there are many communities who live in this village there is one amongst these who specialises in the making of masks and in fact today they are the only ones who are making the Purulia masks. People have tried to connect this community with the main community of the Muras (from whom the *ustāds* of dance are drawn). However, a closer look reveals that the community of mask-makers has to be clearly differentiated from the Gambhir Muras who are the traditional *ustāds*. The mask-makers of Chordia are also the makers of the village deities, the *Grāma devatās*, and today they are occupied either during the time of Purulia Chau, i.e., in Vaisākha or during Durgā Pūjā, which has been accepted by the region. The masks are

made not by wood as in the case of Seraikala Chau. They are made by earth collected from local streams, rags, paper; only occasionally wood is used. The technique followed is simple. A rough design or a model is made in clay. This is known as the "māṭā gadā". On this rough model is pasted a lot of paper and the paper is called by the descriptive term "Kāgaz cheethnā." The clay with the paper is then painted. Wherever necessary, the pieces of cloth are stuck and again there is a down to earth descriptive name of this process, "Kāpar Setāno." Once this model is complete, the whole mask is polished and there is chiselling down by a wooden hammer. Decoration pieces, perforations of the eyes, perforations of the nostrils etc. are the last touches given to the masks. The group of people who make the masks, also make the crowns. These, however, are executed more by the women-folk rather than men.

The costume of Purulia Chau tells us another story of many moments of time co-existing. While the masks and the crowns leave an impression of primeval elements, timeless and dateless, the costumes and dresses bring home associations which are definitely dateable and identifiable. The upper garments of the Chau characters are richly ornate, mostly reminding one of the 16th and 17th century period costumes. This, alas, is also true of some of the forms of South India, particularly the modern versions of Yakṣagāna and Melattur Bhāgavatamelā. Purulia Chau seems to have been very deeply affected by costumes which were worn by the Nawābs and Rājās of the 17th century or early 18th century and they seem to have adapted them for their own purpose. Gods and demons come richly adorned in the style of Rājās or Nawābs. This is restricted to the upper garments. The lower garment tells us another story. For the most part they wear only a tight trouser, in fact more accurately speaking just tights. On these tights are tied many-striped circular ribbons in multi-colour. The total effect is that of a soldier, a policeman with striped calves and thighs. This is in deep contrast to the ornate quality of the upper garment. The stripes of the ribbons follow a pattern and even a symbolism. The stripes of the gods and heroes are green and yellow, of the demons black and red, of characters like Viśvāmitra and Hanumān white. Apparently there is a fantastic coming together of seemingly incongruent elements; nevertheless, an autonomous style is developed. In Purulia Chau, one is struck by this features as soon as the first character appears on the stage. Similar incongruent elements have come together in other dance and dance-drama forms in India.

Purulia Chau represents thus a very significant process of a cultural interaction and distinctiveness in the Indian cultural pattern. The dance style belongs to a group of backward classes. There is a class structure within this on the basis of functionality and vocation. The earlier ani-iconic forms of worship continue. On this there is an overlayering of the traditions of Indian literature, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, and some of the Purāṇas, in time, they become part and parcel of the life of these communities while not obliterating earlier layers. The interconnection is manifested most visibly through dance and music, although earlier practices are observed, the thematic content largely rests on the traditions of the epics and the, Purāṇas. The treatment given to the character and the method of portraiture however shows very clear signs of earlier beliefs and faiths

and purely local concerns. The village deities and their characteristics enter into the characters of Rāma and Rāvāna, Durgā and Lakṣmi, Abhimanyu and Arjuna. In terms of the formal elements, while the drummer and the vocalist may be compared to the *sūtradhāra* of the Sanskrit tradition, there is little or no trace of the rigorous structuring of Sanskrit drama so obvious and unmistakable in the South Indian forms. There is also no division of the acting area into different zones and spaces which in many other dance styles was a continuation of the conventions of the *Kakṣa Vibhāga* (zonal treatment) of Sanskrit theatre. Here the arena is used freely and no attempt is made to identify different areas of the stage with different locales. There is also in Purulia and Seraikala Chaus the very conspicuous absence of the character of *Viduṣaka* who plays such an important role in the traditions of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā. It would appear thus that these forms of Eastern India, i.e., the three Chaus, evolved up from roots of the soil belonging to communities who were perhaps not direct inheritors of the Sanskrit tradition, as seems to be the case with the forms of South India. This is understandable on account of the communities who practise these arts and perhaps because also of the fact that these three forms do not today depend upon the literary word and are not integral to the literary traditions which flourished in Orissa, Bihar and Bengal between the 15th and 18th centuries. The specific forms of the Eastern region which drew their inspiration from literary creations before they became pure theatrical spectacle were the Jātrās. The Jātrā or the procession theatre, again a genre common to Orissa, Bihar, Bengal, Manipur and Assam, is another parallel stream which we shall deal with separately.

Nevertheless, the elements of *mārgī* in the dance vocabulary are obvious in all the three Chaus. Thus, while these forms are certainly *desī* on account of their socio-logical status and lack of the poetic word, they are *mārgī* on account of the elaborate ritual, a *Paurāṇic* content, a chiselled dance vocabulary and the stylization in masks. Together they form a macro-group.

VIII

THE AṄKIĀ-NAṬA AND THE BHĀONĀ

Assam has contributed significantly to Northern and Eastern literacy and dramatic traditions of the medieval period. The formative years of languages like Assamese, Avadhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya and Bengali have had much in common with each other, not only linguistically but also in matters of literacy themes and dramatic form and content.

In the context of the Rāmalīla and Rāsalīlā we shall notice a similar phenomenon, namely, that although these forms flourished mainly in the area now known as Uttar Pradesh, they were in no small measure the result of many influences which had travelled from regions outside Avadha, Vrindavan and Mathura. Again, though these forms are medieval on one level, all belonging to the 16th and 17th centuries, their sources of inspiration as also their thematic content is drawn largely from Sanskrit literature—particularly, the epics and the Purāṇas.

The history of the theatre arts of Assam, particularly that of its Vaiṣṇava theatre revolving around the institution of the 'Sattra' (monasteries), is a parallel flowering indicative of similar cultural processes at work, both in time and space. Although contemporary Assamese traditions of music, dance, dance-drama and theatre can be traced back chiefly to the overpowering personality of Śaṇkaradeva, they have vital links with literary and artistic developments which preceded him by a few centuries. Again, while the Aṅkiā-nāṭa or the Bhāonā is a distinctive form of Assam, it has affinities with theatre forms not only in adjacent areas like Bengal and Orissa but also with those of distant places like Vrindavan and Mathura and even Andhra.

As in the case of the evolution of Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil in the South and the consequential flowering of theatre forms belonging to that region, the development of Assamese also illustrates a process of assimilation of many influences, some foreign to Assam and others regional and indigenous. Also, as elsewhere, there is a fusion here of elements of Sanskrit theatre convention and indegenous local traditions. Two parallel streams, embodying multiple movements of time are in evidence.

For an understanding of the Vaiṣṇava theatre of Assam we have to look at the rich and variegated cultural history of the land, the development of the Assamese language and the many connections of the region with allied movements in other parts of India.

The history of Assam is complex and fascinating. For centuries, there have been

layers upon layers of cultural influences which have come from diverse regions. Certain pockets have remained insulated and can be precisely dated. Others have been overlayered giving rise to new and fresh developments.

As in adjacent Manipur, here also the population comprises tribal as well as rural communities and city people. All have been in interaction with each other in spite of the apparent isolation of the hill tribes from those living in the valley. Also, in spite of the clear demarcation between the pre-Vaiṣṇava and Vaiṣṇava cultures, there are many overlaps and lines of continuities and no total breaks.

From the earliest times Assam has been a meeting ground of many racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural elements, not only from India but also from other parts of Asia. Its earliest inhabitants have been identified as the Niṣādhas and Kirātas mentioned in the epics and Purāṇas. At places, they have also been described as the mlecchas and asuras. The earliest epigraphical references to Kāmarūpa belongs to the 5th century (Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta) and a vivid account of the region called Prāgjyotiṣapura or Kāmarūpa is found in *Kālikā Purānā* of the 10th century A.D. Linguistic and ethnographic evidence lead to the conclusion that the earliest inhabitants spoke an Indo-Chinese language of the Mon-Khmer group. The Khasis and Synetagas, according to some scholars, are perhaps descendents of these early inhabitants. The region was then subjected to waves of Indo-Chinese invasions through the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Iravati. Many of these tribes occupied the Garo hills and the hills of Tippera; some others went as far as the highlands of North Kachar but did not overpower the area now known as the Khasi and Jaintia hills. They spread all over the Naga hills and some parts of Manipur. Of these Tibeto-Burman races, who made Assam their home, the largest and most important was the Bodo tribe. There are many sub-groups of the tribe today, the two most important being the Kacharis and the Dimachas. The Bodos have left a deep impact on the culture of Assam and many names of rivers and places are of Bodo origin. In course of time the Ahoms, a tribe of Tai or Shan race, arrived in the 13th century from Yunan through Burma.

Simultaneously, Aryans also penetrated into the land. Assam was known to the writers of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata.* The literary references are clear. Also from early inscriptions dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries we learn of special land grants for the promotion of Vedic learning and scholarship.

The geographical situation of Assam and the Brahmaputra river in particular, facilitated this mobility and interaction not only in matters of trade and commerce but also in the sphere of culture. Each succeeding wave brought with it a new element which in course of time was assimilated.

These developments led to the emergence, in the 7th century, of the Assamese language. Though derived directly from Sanskrit, it incorporates many phonological and morphological traits of the Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan and Tai or Mon tribes. The multiracial milieu in which the language developed explains the latter's phonological peculiarities. What is true of the language is also true of the literature and the other arts, particularly the performing arts.

Some linguists have tried to connect Assamese with the Eastern Prakrit, thinking it to be a direct descendant of Māgadhī. The Prācya Apabhraranśa is indeed the common parent of Oriya, Bengali and Assamese. It also gave rise to another language known as Daśabhāsa or just bhāṣā which some think to be precursor of Avadhi, Braj, Rajasthani, Gujarati and other languages. These linguistic factors are important and pertinent in a study of the development of theatre forms in different parts of India. The linguistic affinities often provide a clue to the mobility among different Indian regions and theatre is a potent medium of this inter-regional communication.

Thus, in spite of its distinctive identity, Assamese by the 8th century became a member of a larger family of language and literature. Its resemblance to other members of the family was unmistakable. Indeed, it is this factor which has often led literary historians and critics of particular regions to claim exclusive ancestry for some genres of artistic creation. A case in point is the controversy about whether the songs and aphorisms known as the Caryās and Dohās and composed by the Buddhist *Siddhācāryas* between the 8th and 12th centuries belong to early Bengali or Assamese. Similarly, Mīrabāi is also claimed by both modern Hindi and Gujarati. In the context of the performing arts, specially those which rest on the literary word, the pattern is repeated. It may be difficult sometimes to accept exclusive claims by protagonists of particular languages for some plays written in those formative years of the regional languages.

As already stated, Assamese shares many characteristics with the Bengali, Oriya, Marathi and Rajasthani languages. Also, the Vaiṣṇava movement gave a near pan-Indian complexion to some of these developments: the poetic language called Brajabauli was the medium of this movement and Vāiṣṇava poets from Assam, Bengal, Mithila and Vraj all wrote in it.

The Aṅkia-nāṭa of Assam, although a much later development, formed part of that category of compositions which had this extra-regional dimension we have just referred to. However surprising it may sound, contemporary research has traced the beginnings of Hindi to the Aṅkia-nāṭa and other theatre forms of Assam.

The period between the 13th and 16th centuries was one of great unrest and turmoil. Successive invasions, wars and battles shook the foundations of existing kingdoms and led to the establishment of many small principalities. Notwithstanding these political developments and the ravages they caused, the beginnings of Assamese literature can be traced back to this period. Harivaravipra, poet in the court of Durlabhanārāyaṇa, recreated the *Aśvamedha Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* in Assamese and followed it with *Bhabhrvāhana Yudha* and *Lava Kuśer Yudha*. The original Sanskrit themes were only a take-off point to enable the poet to introduce many innovations and new elements in high dramatic style. Hema Saraswatī, a contemporary of Harivaravipra in the 13th Century, drew upon the *Vāmana Purāṇa* to write his *Prahlāda Carita*. He leaned for his material not only on the Purāna but drew freely from local legends and folklore. The same trend can be seen in his next work, *Hara Gaurī Samvāda*. Other poets and writers followed; most used the *Mahābhārata* as a main source.

The Kachāri King Mahāmāṇikya encouraged many pre-Vaiṣṇava poets, the most

notable among them being Mādhava Kandali who translated the *Rāmāyaṇa* into Assamese. Unlike his immediate predecessors, although he used many colloquial expressions, in thematic content he adhered more closely to the original *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is to be noted that this 14th century translation preceded *Rāmāyaṇa* versions in Hindi, Bengali and Oriya by nearly a hundred and fifty years.

A perusal of these works tells us of the deep influence of Sanskrit epics on most writers, but they also convince us of the beginnings of a distinctive regional literary style full of local colour. Mādhava Kandali was possibly the author also of *Devaji*, a poetic composition on Kṛṣṇa and other incarnations of Viṣṇu. When Śaṅkaradeva came on the scene much later, he was deeply influenced by the writing of Mādhava Kandali and echoes of the latter's work can be found in the dramas of Śaṅkaradeva. In the 15th and 16th centuries appeared other poets, writers and dramatists who not only drew upon the *Rāmāyaṇa* but also utilised potent material which was deeply rooted in the regional culture. One such important theme revolved around the goddess Manasā and gave rise to a particular form of narrative poem. Among those who continued to draw upon the *Rāmāyaṇa* was Durgāvara, author of *Gīti Rāmāyaṇa* which introduced for the first time the convention of singing out the verse. This development coincided with the adoption, in other parts of India, of a similar convention of singing verses from a text.

It is against the background of this historical and literary developments that we must understand the meteoric rise of Śaṇkaradeva in the 16th century and his unique contribution as a social reformer, poet, musician, dramatist and drama director. He came on the scene also when the small principalities had re-organised themselves to constitute only two kingdoms, i.e., those of the Kachāras and the Ahoms. Viśva Siṁha was a great ruler of the Kachārās and was succeeded by an illustrious son, Naranārāyaṇa, who was a contemporary of Akbar. Among the Ahoms also, there were signs of important changes taking place. For example, an Ahom king called Suhummung embraced Hinduism and changed his name to Svarga Nārāyaṇa.

Śaṇkaradeva, born in a Bhuya family, was responsible for transforming Assamese society in many ways. He renounced the world, travelled far and wide, imbibed teachings and cultures of other regions, and finally returned home to give a new message of Vaiṣṇavism. This naturally weakened the stronghold of sects and groups committed to Tantrism and various kinds of *Śakti* worship. Indeed, his was a clear and unequivocal protest against the dogma, superstitions and blind ritualistic practices which were then prevalent in and around the Kāmākhāya temple.

Because of his total concern with the life and society of his times, Śaṇkaradeva could pioneer a cultural renaissance in Assam. The 'Sattra' as an institution was the vehicle of his movement; it provided the venue and atmosphere for religious, social and artistic activity. A full fledged 'Sattra' comprised a *nāmaghara*, a *maṇikūṭa* and *hātis*. The *nāmaghara* is the congregational prayer hall and the *maṇikūṭa* the sanctum or *siṁhāsana* of the 'Sattra' at the extreme end of the *nāmaghara*; the hātis are living quarters built for the monks.

The *nāmaghara* provided and continues to provide the venue for the theatrical

performance: it is often called *bhāonā ghara*. Though the architectural features of the *nāmaghara*, *manikuta* and *hātis* are unique to Assam, they are as rigorously planned as the Kuaṭṭambalam used in Kerala for Kuṭṭiyaṭṭam and the roofing patterns and the manner of laying the gables and reefs are also similar. Sometimes a special platform only with a roof and supported with pillars and no walls is made; this is called the *'rabhā'*. While it is not known for certain whether Śaṇkaradeva provided the architectural plan of the 'Sattra' or not, it is quite clear that the institution was of his making and that his plays were written with an eye for this particular structure which had the dual function of being a congregational prayer hall as also a stage and an auditorium. Of Śaṇkaradeva's predecessors in Assamese, we have already spoken. He was, however, indebted both to them as also to Sanskrit literature of the medieval period. Assamese scholars like Dr Maheshwar Neog are firmly of the opinion that the Sanskrit drama of the 11th and 12th centuries left a deep impact on him. His acquaintance with *Prabhodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Misra and the *Mahānāṭaka* of Hanumat is evident from his plays, particularly the *Bhakti ratnakāra* and *Śri-Rāma Vijaya.* Thematic echoes and dramatic structural affinities among these plays are many. Both the *Prabhodhacandrodaya* and *Mahānāṭaka,* unlike tbe Sanskrit drama of the earlier period, are devoid of the usual divisions into acts and scenes. They make a continuous reading of the narrative and are intended to be presented as such. The *nāndi* and the *prastāvanā* parts are also absent from these plays. Śaṇkaradeva appears to have modelled his plays on these structural features and he follows the *Rāmāyaṇa-giti* by using the sung word as a main vehicle of communication. He may also have incorporated the traditions of collective singing known to other parts of India and to Assam itself. While doubt is cast on the view that he drew heavily on the tradition of the Ojā-palli, which combines singing with drum *(Khol)* playing and dancing, it is perhaps not incorrect to suggest that Śaṇkaradeva with his breath of vision and openness of mind may have looked at all contemporary forms in order to create something new in his Ankiā-nāṭas and their presentation as Bhāona, the dramatic spectacle. The 'Dhuliā' was a distinct form of collective singing in Assam, which was accompanied by drums. 'Bhoriyā' was the indigenous ballad form involving both solo and group artistes. Besides these Ojā-palli, there were the *yātrās* of the community and the marionette play tradition of the Putulnac. The conventions of a continuous flow of dramatic action may well have come from the *yātrā* form and Śaṇkaradeva's acquaintance with the form is borne out by the fact that he calls some of his dramas, particularly the *Kāliya*-damana, a *yātrā*. Other elements such as the extensive introductory part of drumming may have been inspired by the Dhulliā.

While these literary sources and theatrical forms may have contributed to the specific dramatic structure of Śaṇkaradeva's dramas, in thought and content the predominant inspiration was again the *Bhāgavata Puraṇa* as in the case of the Rāsalīla of Mathura. He not only undertook to translate many chapters of this voluminous *Purāṇa*, particularly Books I, II, III, VI, VII, IX, X, XI and XII, but also made his disciples translate other sections. The subject matter of all his plays with the sole exception of one (namely, *Śri-Rāma Vijaya nāṭa*) is drawn from the *Bhagavata Purāṇa*. *Rukmiṇiharaṇa nāta, Pārijāta-*

haraṇa nāta, Kālīya-damana, Amrta-manthana, Prahlāda Carita, Gajendra-upākhyāna Vipra-patnī prasāda and Kīrtanaghosa are all based on the same Purāna. The themes of his *Hariṣcandra Upākhyāna* were inspired by the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. The *Bhakti Pradipa* was drawn from the *Garuda Purana* and the Anandi patana from *Vāmana Purana*. His extensive literary output also included many lyrical compositions called the 'Baragitas' and doctrinal works like the *Bhaktiratnākara*.

The themes of plays like *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa, Pārijāta-haraṇa* and *Kāliya-damana* were popular throughout India in this period. The Bhāgavatamelā, the Yakṣagāna and some other forms all use these stories for the theatre. The *Kāligopāla* and the *Vipra-patnī prasāda*, on the other hand, had, thematically, more in common with episodes popular in the Rāsālīlā. Indeed, the Purāṇas and their themes provided an underlying unity to artistic activity in all the arts, particularly the performing arts.

While the thematic content of the plays was common and drawn from the same source, the treatment and the artistic expressions were diverse, and distinctively regional, where local and indigenous developments played an important part. This pattern is almost uniform in the period (roughly, 15th/16th centuries) throughout India.

The writings of Śaṇkaradeva, whether purely dramatic as in the case of the Ankiā-nāṭas or lyrical as the collection of *Kirtanas* or the poetic compositions called Baragītas, all provided material for performance. The Ankiā-nāṭas were couched in Brajabauli, a mixture of Maithili and Assamese, which, with slight linguistic variations depending on the regions, was also prevalent in Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. The language also provided a link with Vrindavan and thus with the language of Vraja.

Śaṇkaradeva's plays are also examples of the same amalgamation of Sanskrit and regional traditions. While the conventions of the *sutradhāra, nāndī, pūrvaraṅga*, etc. are strictly adhered to, there are many innovations and departures in dramatic structure. The total result is a new form but one which is akin to dramatic structures evolved in the context of the Bhagavatamela, Yakṣāgana, etc. The Sangītaka and the Uparūpaka of later Sanskrit drama were obviously the immediate precursors of these regional forms. Lyrical passages were intermixed with prose passages and the dramatic performance paid much greater attention to recitation, singing, accompanying music, dance movement and pantomime than was known to Sanskrit drama between the 5th to 8th centuries. The seeds of a fuller use of music were nevertheless present in Sanskrit drama even in the early period, as is borne out by the fact that *Cautubhāni* of the 5th century A.D. clearly refers to a form of theatre called the Saṅgītaka in his Ubhayābhisarika. By the time of Harṣa it was a recognised form of drama as is evident from a reference to it in Bāna Kādambari (8th century). The description of the playing of Harsa's *Ratnāvalī* in Kuṭṭnimaṭṭam of Dāmodara-Gupta (9th century) also convinces us of the dominant role of music and dance. Finally, there is the *Karpūramañjari* of Rājaśekhara where a distinct form called "Saṭṭaka" had already come to stay.

The plays of Śaṇkaradeva and his disciplines followed the loose structure of this later Sanskrit drama. The structure of the play continued to be pegged to the principles of the *sandhis* or junctures. These artistic traditions were fostered by the institution of the Sattras.

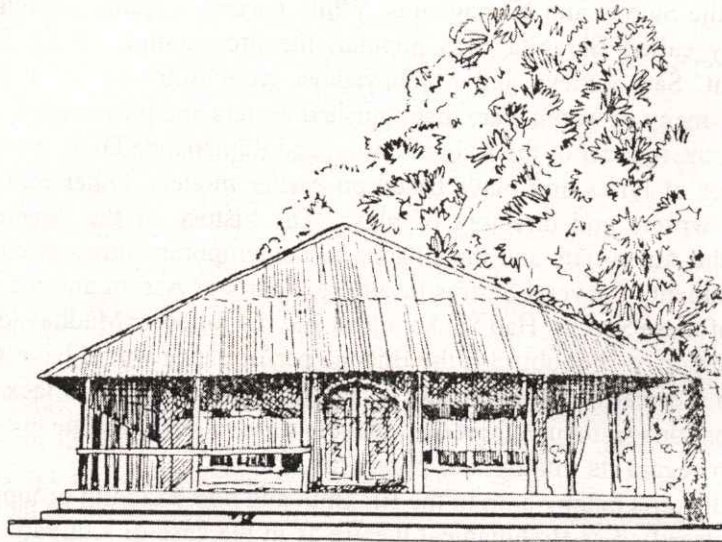
Saṇkaradeva and his chief disciple Mādhavadeva made it almost obligatory on the head of a Sattra to write and present plays as part of his initiation rites. The tradition of writing Aṇkiā-nāṭas and the presentation of the Bhāona thus became an integral part of the activities of the Sattras and Nāmagharas. While Kīrtana singing, particularly of the Assamese variety called Baragīta, was popular, the presentation of the Bhāona was equally important. Śaṇkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were followed by a long line of Vaiṣṇava leaders, many of whom were distinguished writers and playwrights. Both Gopal Āta (1547-1611), the founder of the Kaljhar Sattra, and Rāmānanda Dvija were composers of a large number of lyrics and plays based on earlier models. Other Sattra adhikaris continued to be writers and directors of plays. The history of the development and continuation of the Aṇkiā-nāta and the Bhāona in contemporary times is closely linked with the establishment of several Sattras in different parts of Assam and the long line of lineage of each of these Sattras. Had Śaṇkaradeva and his follower Mādhavadeva not laid this strong foundation, it is doubtful if the Bhāona performance would have survived. As it is, the tradition is already a little thin and is languishing on account of lack of adequate and appropriate patronage, though there are valuable survivals. With some encouragement, this tradition can regain its vitality and popularity.

The Sattra adhikaris belong both to the Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups. The form, thus, cannot be classified as Brahmanical theatre as in the case of Kuṭiyaṭṭam of Kerala or Bhāgavatamelā of Melattur. The actors, all men, may come from the monastic order but are not restricted to the inmates of the Sattra: they may come from any village community, unlike their counterparts in the Chau forms. The Vaiṣṇava movement had a democratising influence and this is evident in the activities of the Sattra and performances of the Bhāonā.

This historical and sociological perspective is necessary to understand a contemporary Bhaona performance which has often been misrepresented as a minor folk form struggling for survival. In reality, it has a rich and complex background with firm roots in the Sanskrit as well as Assamese traditions.

To come to the performance itself, there is first the nāmaghara or rabhā (the specially constructed paṇḍāla) which provides the venue of the performance. The *nāmaghjara* is a rectangular structure with collapsible walls of bamboo or reed. In an Ankia-nata performance often the walls are removed. Alternately, a *paṇḍāla* is specially erected, as we have mentioned earlier. The *rabhā* (or *paṇḍāla*) is about 300 feet long and 60 feet wide. In either case, at one end of the floor area is the sanctum sanctorum (the *maṇikūṭa*): this is also called the *Siāpanā* or the Siṁhāsana. Auspicious articles are placed in the maṇikūṭa and these are coverred with colourful textiles. The whole structure is supported by wooden posts and has a multiple roof of tin and hay. The wooden pillars are decorated with embroidered cloth before a performance, which provides for better acoustics. Although the strucutre has none of the complexities of the Kuṭṭambalam of Kerala, it is vaguely reminiscent of the same principles. To one side of the *nāmaghara* or even as a part of the hall is a small enclosure used for storing accessories (*cho*). It is called the 'cho-ghara', equivalent to the *nepathyagṛha* or the green room. Costumes, masks and

other accessories are kept here. Since the Bhāonā performances often utilise models of mountains, animal chariots, etc. as props and decor, all these are stored here.



The floor space in the *rabhā* is clearly demarcated for the orchestra, the actors, and the audience. The orchestra sits right opposite at the other end of the *maṇikūṭa*, so that it constantly faces the sanctum. The acting area is restricted to the middle where the performance is held. The audience sits surrounding the actors on the outer sides, on mats or stands. The acting area is often covered with a canopy *(candrātapa)* of white cloth with frilled edges and decorations in red. The lighting is provided by a most ingenious method of sticking earthern lamps to the trunks of *Kadalī* trees : these are called *gacha* and give an effect of chandeliers. While these earthern lamps with mustard oil and wicks provide the continuous subdued lighting, dramatic effects are created by mobile torches called 'ariya' or 'agnigherā' when cloth, soaked in oil, is burnt and flashed to herald the entry of an important character on the stage. Areas are earmarked for special categories of people amongst the audience. Closest to the maṇikūṭa or the sanctum sit the Sattara adhikārīs or other dignitaries of the village. On the other outer sides sit or stand others; often there is a place specially reserved for women. The audience comprises all castes and once again the dictum of Bharata comes true that theatre is open to all, irrespective of caste or class. As in other parts of India, there are significant preliminaries before the actual performance. The actors invariably fast the day before the performance. This is particularly true of those who take the role of *Sūtradhāra, Kṛṣṇa* or *Rāma*. There is also a whole day of collective singing of *Kirtana,* specially *nāmakīrtana,* preceding the performance. Indeed, the preliminaries of the Aṇkiā-nāṭa performance have very close and significant affinities with the different phases of the *pūrvaraṅga* described in the *Nāṭyaśastra.*

The musicians enter, divide into two groups, one sitting on the right and the other on the left, or one behind the other called *gāya* and *bāyana* respectively. This constitutes an important preliminary. They enter the stage to the accompaniment of fire-works called 'mahata-mata and mobile torches on poles called agnigherā and agnigadā mentioned above. Sometimes these torches on upright poles make a fire arch. The number of torches can vary from 6 to 9 or 14 or 21. The musicians enter behind a white screen held by two assistants. The screen or curtain is whisked away and torches flash as soon as all the musicians have taken their positions and are ready to begin. The audience enthusiastically welcomes them through cries of *jaya hari bol* and *jaya raina bol* etc. We have noticed similar entry conventions and the holding of a screen in practically all other dance-drama forms of India. Here, the screen, known as the Arkapor is invariably white, unlike the screen in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna or the Rāsalīlā curtain. The entry of the musicians is often accompanied by another character in mask who introduces a comic note. While there are no direct connections, all these preliminaries remind one of the entry of Kodangi of Yakṣaganā and Kāji-pāji of Mayurbhanj Chau. The entire phase consisting of the playing on the drums, introduction of songs and the masked character is known by the term *dhemāli*, which corresponds to the Sanskrit *pūrvaraṅga.* There are many traditions of *dhemāli* in the various Sattras-nearly twelve different kinds, according to scholars like Dr Maheshwar Neog.

The *cāhini* and the *gurughaṭa ghoṣa, a dhemāli* are indicative of the artistic mood of the play. While the *cāahini* is a brief or long display of skills of playing on percussion instruments, the *ghoṣa* introduces the first preliminary song or *Kirtana* to the accompaniment of the *Khot* and the cymbals. Immediately after the *dhemālis* such as the bar-dhemāli (long preliminary) or *na-dhemāli* (new preliminary) or *nata-dhemāli* (dance preliminary), the *Sūtradhāra* enters. This is the first entry of the dramatis personae and *is* appropriately termed *pātra-praveśa.* He first performs a dance and then sings a *nāndī* recalling an essential preliminary of the Sanskrit stage. Through the *nāndī* (sung *ślokas* often set to a definite *rāga)* he announces the subject matter: this part is akin to the *prarocanā* mentioned by Bharata. Another song called the 'bhātima' follows and through it the salient features of the plot and characters are introduced. This is the counterpart of the Sanskrit *prastāvanā.* Often brief dances are interspread between these different sections. The last section of the *Sūtradhāra's* introduction consists of a song which introduces the hero and announces his entry : this is *praveśa-gīta.* The white curtain is held up once again to mark the conclusion of the *Pūrvaraṇga* (the word is not used in Assamese). Immediately after, the hero enters to the accompaniment of another song, when the curtain is lowered or taken away. Songs introducing other characters follow until most of the important characters of the evening's performance are on the stage. Each of them walk around as if introducing themselves, perform some simple steps to the *praveśa-gīta* and then take their seats at appropriate places earmarked for them. These conventions are somewhat different from the *pātra-praveśa* of other forms like the Yakṣagāna and Chau. The *pātra-praveśa* is important in the latter but is characterised by a sequential appearance and return to the greenroom of these characters. In Chau, the

characters assume particular stances *(dhāranās)* the time of the first entry. The *praveśa-gītas,* of however, are Bhasna correspond more to the *praveśa-dārus* of Bhāgavatamelā forms.

The drama proper then begins as one long sustained spectacle with the loose structure of the *sandhis* but with no division into acts and scenes. The *Sūtradhāra,* unlike his Sanskrit counterpart, but like the Bhagāvata of Yakṣagāna and the Bhagāvātālu of Bhāgavatamelā, remains on the scene throughout. He conducts and directs the play and provides the interlinking passages for taking the narrative forward.

Not all dramas contain *nāndi ślokas* and all the *bhātimās* (songs) for the preliminaries. The *Patnāprasāda* of Śaṇkaradeva, for example, does not have a *nāndi* or the initial invocatory *bhātimā*. Some other plays, however, begin with these. The drama is presented, as in the case of other forms, through an amalgam of prose passages, recited verse, sung poetry, and drama. The emphasis on each element varies from play to play depending upon the theme. Thus in the *Patnīprasāda* which is based on portions of the tenth *skanda* of the *Bhāgavatā Purāṇa,* there is a large section devoted to the presentation of the 'rāsakā' exactly in the same manner as we encounter in the Vraj rāsa. Circular dances around Kṛṣṅa abound and the musical content is rich. The part played by *nṛtya* is important and we can discern a fairly rich body of dance technique here which has both pure dance *(nṛtta)* and miming *(nṛtya* and *angikābhinaya).* The latter is predominant in this and other plays like *Kali-Gopāla.* However, in contrast, in the *Śri-Rāma Vijaya* the spoken and recited verse assumes greater importance. In the *Pārijāta-haraṇa* songs predominate and in the *Rukmiṇi-haraṇa* there is a judicious mixture of all.

The plays of Mādhavadeva are operatic in character and he draws freely from the *Bilvamangala.* His presentation style is more lyrical than dramatic and his range of language and acting skills not quite as wide. The dramas of Śaṇkaradeva were self-consciously cast with a multi-dialect and multi-media approach. He obviously wanted to reach all sections of the people and therefore composed his dramas to meet diverse tastes and levels of society. A drama is said to be composed of seven elements, which Dr Maheshwar Neog describes in the following manner:

> The *gāyana* and *bāyanas* (orchestra) add to the glamour of the assembly. The *connoisseur* appreciates the words of the *Sūtradhāra* and the dances: the Sanskrit verses are composed as there will be scholars to grasp their meaning. The brahmins in the assembly will comprehend the meaning of the songs. The common village folk will understand the Brajabauli words. The ignorant people will witness the masks and the effigies (*cho*). Above all, uttered correctly or incorrectly, the drama presented is but the celebration of Krishna's name. These are seven peerless elements of a drama.

These dramas have been popularly called Aṅkiā-nāṭa although the name does not figure in any of Śankaradeva's plays. He uses instead the terms yātrā: *nāṭaka, nrtya* and even *naṭa.* His successors, particularly Rāmānanda and Rāmacarṇa, used the term Ankiā-nāṭa to describe Śankaradeva's plays and that appellation has come to stay. The term Jhumar is used for describing the category of performance envisaged by Mādhavadeva for his plays.

In any case, whether the Bhāonā performances can be called *nāṭakas* or *nṛtya* or *yātrās* or *jhumar*, they are a distinct class of performance. The structure has many affinities with forms prevalent in or outside Assam. We have identified the elements common to the Sanskrit theatre and Ankiā-nāta and those which are distinctive to it.

Not only the spoken word, but also music and dance have important roles to play in this form. The last two are integral to the dramatic piece and are not accessories or ornamentation. This is a characteristic feature of all drama forms of India and is present even in contemporary performances in urban centres, where modern themes have been presented through traditional modes.

Assamese music has a special flavour though it incorporates many features of what is generally called Hindustani music. At the same time, the musical compositions integrated into the body of a play are part of an Assamese tradition which also exists independently. What is true of music is also true of the dance technique and the movement patterns contained in the Aṇkiā-nāṭa

The Baragītas, whether of Śankaradeva or of others, are all set to a particular melody. In structure they are closest to the *dhruvanāda* or *prabandha* with the four sections of a *dhruva (sthāyī),* an *antarā,* a *sañchari* and an *ābhoga.* However, unlike the present *dhruvapada* singing they may or may not be accompanied by a percussion instrument or set to a metrical cycle *(tāla).* The dramas use a style of singing and a pattern of setting each verse to a specific melody, which is almost uniformally followed in India, but here the drum *(khol)* and the cymbols *(mañjirā)* accompaniment is essential both within the dramatic piece and independently. Each *Aṇkiā-gīta* thus has its particular *rāga* and *tāla.* The preliminary *bhātimā* songs are often rendered without a metrical cycle *(tala)* and may often be without a *rāga.* The *bhātimā* singing in deep sonorous voices is an intermediary stage between the pure recitative word and the sung lyric. Śaṇkaradeva utilises nearly thirty-four *rāgas* in the lyrics of his plays; so does Mādhavadeva. The names of many indicate their association with Hindustani music such as Bhūpālī, Vasanta, Kedāra etc.; others are clearly indicative of rāgas or melodies which originated in different regions, such as Kannada, Gujarī, Gaurī, etc. Some are distinctive only to Assam and appear to be of local origin. In the matter of tala also, it appears that some were common to other parts of India, such as ektāla, rūpaka, and a few were unique to Assam. Nearly twelve tālas and another twelve upatālas are known to Assamese music and dance. Their detailed analysis and comparision with those prevalent in North India, Orissa, Bengal and Manipur would reveal many interesting points of contract and interaction. Indeed no such comparative study of the tāla systems and mnemonics (bols) has so far been undertaken.

The musical instruments include the *mṛudaṇga* made of clay or the *khol* made of wood, and cymbals of different shapes and varieties. While other percussion instruments like the *dundubhi, bheri, gomukha, paṭaha,* etc. are mentioned *in* Vaiṣṇava literature, they seem to have gone out of actual practice. Outside, in dramatic performances the use of some stringed instruments, specially a simple type of *vīṇa* or a ṭokāri which is a kind of

ektārā, is common. Clappers like the Rāmatāla and Karatāla are used in devotional singing but not in the context of the Bhāona performances.

The dance technique is interesting and has some affinities with styles outside Assam. The Sattra dances, although a pure *Vaṣṇava* flowering, have also to be seen together with the strong tradition of the deodhāni dancing of the Manasā worship and the naṭi dancing of the Mādhava Hari Vijaya temple. Both these traditions along with possibly the Ojāpalli dancers antedate the creation of the dances for the Bhāonā performance. Mutual interaction and influence is not ruled out, not to speak of the many styles of community folk and tribal dancing known to the region which too may have played a role here. In the absence of intensive critical and technical studies, it is impossible to make a categorical statement on the history of evolution of the Sattra form of dance. It can, however, be stated with some certainty that Śaṇkaradeva conceived of dancing mainly as part of the dramatic performance and not as something which may exist independently. Traditionally, the dances are grouped into three different types of *bhaṅgīs*, each taking its name from the characters. Thus we have the *Sūtrabhaṅgī, Kṛṣṇabhaṇgi* and *Gopībhaṇgi*. They appear to denote cadences of movement and choreographical patterns rather than stances. The *Sūtrabhaṅgi* is further divided into the 'Sārubha. ṅgi' (small, minor, gentle) and 'barbhaṅgī' (big, vigorous). These are executed at the time of the *nāndī* and bhātimā singing. The dance begins with gentle movements and obeisance in the sārubhaṅgī; this corresponds perhaps to *lāsya* of *the Naṭyaśāstra* tradition and the *smita aṅga* mentioned in a theoretical text found in Manipur.

The *bārbhaṅgī* follows with open vigorous steps and indicates *taṇḍava* or the *sphurita aṅga* mentioned in the Manipuri tradition. The *Kṛśṇabhaṅgī* is also known as the "gosāin praveśer nāc"; it is performed to coincide with *praveśa-gīta* which is sung to announce the entry of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma. Many dexterous patterns are woven and there is a frequent use of *hastas* like the *Kartarimukha* or showing a flute and many other such objects. The text followed for the *hastābhinaya* is Śubhaṇkara's *Hastamuktāvalī* of the 17th-18th century. Kṛṣṇa's movement do not however comprise the pirouetters or circling on the knees so characteristic of Vraj rāsa, Manipuri rāsa and portions of *Yaksagāna*.

The *gopibhaṇgī* in deep contrast is characterised by slow sinuous curvilinear movements. While it has some similarity with certain types of Manipuri dancing, a closer look reveals that the methods of articulation of movement are quite different. Knees are bent here slightly to either side giving a vague impression of *ardhamaṇdalī*, and the closing and opening of the '*allapallava hastas*' is also quite different. The torso is used as one unit in contrast to Manipuri where it is broken up into the upper chest and lower waist. The use of the shoulder as a separate unit is a feature totally absent in Manipuri. However the basic circular motif or figure of eight motif is common to Sattra dancing and Manipuri. The *gopībhaṅgī* and another type of *bhaṅgī* known as the *nṛtyabhaṅgī* are frequently used in the positions of the *Rāsa Krīḍa* of Śaṅkaradeva. In the *nṛtyabhaṅgī* three pairs of gopa and gopī take part and each performs along the circumference of a circle. It is often performed to the rāsa jhumar, a lyrical composition of Mādhavadeva. The *gopibhaṅgī* is used in the *Rāsa nṛtya* sequence in the *Rāsa Kriḍa* of Śaṅkaradeva.

Here many gopīs dance in a circle with Kṛṣṇa in the middle. In either, it is *nṛtta* (pure dancing) rather than *abhinaya* or *nṛtya,* notwithstanding the nomenclature. Dips and diagonal torso movements and figure of eight arm movements, abound in these. There is a flow of movement, rather than clusters of quick percussive steps, followed by a lingering metrical cycle chain. Closely related to the *bhaṅgīs* (which stand for one category of movements) are the *cāalis,* a word which is prevalent in all parts of Eastern India, including Orissa. The Mayurbhanj and Seraikala Chau forms and Manipuri use it, but with different connotations and meanings. We have already referred to some of the complexities of the terminology in an earlier chapter. Here suffice it to say that the *cāali* of Aṅkia-nāṭa, like the Sattra dancing, stands more for a composition as in the case of Manipuri rather than a stance or a cadence of movement. The word without doubt is derived from the Sanskrit word *cārī* and is sometimes called *natuwā nāc*, signifying the dance of the young monks as gopīs. As in the case of the *natyabhaṅgī,* it also is performed in two sections, the "ganac" and the "rāmadani." In the former, only two *tālas* are used, namely; ektāli and pantāli; in the latter as many as twelve different types of metrical cycles and rhythmic patterns can be used. The *caalis* of Assam and Manipuri are closer to each other and it is indeed in these sections that one can see the close connection between the styles of dancing not only of these two regions, but also of dance styles prevalent in Hajo temple outside the Sattras, as also a few other styles known to other parts of India. The compositions have a simple walking pattern where weight is shifted lightly from one foot to the other. Slow movements are executed to the basic rhythmic beats of the metrical cycle: this is followed by a pattern of rendering clusters of mnemonics or *bols* of the *mṛdaṅga* or the *khol* through body movement patterns, all to synchronize with the first beat of the next metrical cycle. The principles governing these are the same as followed in the "bhaṅgī pareṅga" of Manipuri, the "ṭorā-ṭukrā" pattern of Kathak and the *tirmānam* of Bhāraṭanatyam. The *cāli* or the *nātuwa* nāc is the richest in dance technique with a delicate use of neck involving movements of shoulder, torso, waist, hips and feet, as in the other classical dance styles of India. Little wonder that it is today not confined to the performance of the Bhāonā but is often done separately as just dance.

Within the body of the drama, dance enters significantly in the *pravesa-gīta*. Each *praveśa-gīta* of a character is accompanied by a *praveśa-nāc* or *bhāvariya* or *bhoriyā nāc*. These dance and movement sequences are akin to the definite dhāraṇas of the Chau, although each character does not have such definite stylised walking gaits or stances as in the Chaus, particularly the Purulia Chau.

In the *Aṅkiā-nāṭas* like *Narakā suravadha* and others where battles are shown and demons like Kāliya are vanquished, the *yudhar nāc* is presented. Here also there is hardly any *abhinaya* or mime to a sung line: it is, instead, a pure war dance with open vigorous movements showing fighting and combat. *Hastābhinaya* is however fully developed and its textual sanction is derived from the *Hastamuktāvali.* The hand gestures are called "hāt" in Sattra dancing, and the fundamental exercises are called "mati-akhara."

Although the Bhāonā has both pure dance *(nṛtta)* and some miming *(abhinaya* or

nṛtya), the relationship of the sung word and the gesture is general and vague and not precise and sequentially descriptive or synchronized as in Kuṭiyaṭṭam or even the Bhāgavatamelā forms. In this respect the stylization and the chiselling is less of those dance styles which are termed as formal classical. This may be the result of the weakening of a tradition rather than an inherent quality of the school of dance and drama which flourished in Assam.

The dramatic form, however, utilises both *dharmīs* (styles of presentation), i.e., *nattya* and *loka;* the two *vṛttis* (the *Bhāratī* and *Kaiśekī;* and at least three types of *abhinayas* namely, the *vācika,* the *angika,* the *āharyā,* and occasionally also the *Sāttvika.* In short, it again fulfils all the criteria of classical drama and cannot be called a folk or unsophisticated form although its milieu and external social environment are the village community and a religious social institution.

The costume, the models and props used as dècor, and the make-up are interesting and typically Assamese with connections with Manipur, Vraj and some other parts of India.

The most typical and elegant costume is that of the *Sūtradhāra.* Like the Maiba and Maibees (priest and priestess) of Manipur, he is dressed in immaculate white. He wears a long full skirt coming down to the ankles very much like the Svegi dancers of far-off Himachal seen in the Pahari miniatures. The costume is also seen in miniatures of the Assamese schools. He wears a full sleeved coat which comes down to the waist. The skirt is called the "ghuri" and the uppergarment the "phatau." A broad band called "Karadhani" or "ghunuca jari" is tied on the waist over the lower and upper garments. His head-dress is impressive and Assamese miniature paintings are a rich source for tracing the gradual changes which have come about in costuming and head-dress. Different Sattras today use two or three types of "pagaris" or turbans. In some, the "pag" or "pagari" (turban), with upright sides (*thiya-kaniya*) and visually somewhat elliptical, is a little protruding in front: at other times, it is called "moghalai topi" and resembles the headgear of Moghul Kings. Such changes and adoption of costuming fashions of ruling kings or foreigners are known to other parts of India. We observe the same phenomenon in the context of Yātrā and have already seen it in the case of Bhāgavatamelā and the Chaus. Thus while the skirt and the waist-coat have a timeless quality, the turban or the "pagari" is almost period costuming and definitely datable.

The young boys who perform the role of the *nātuwa* are also dressed in the same fashion although in their case a veil is thrown over the head-dress to suggest that they are playing the character of a woman.

The costumes of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are a class by themselves. While Kṛṣṇa's *dhotī* is yellow and Balarāma's is blue as in Vraj rāsa, etc., the torso is covered with an embroidered yellow cloth in the case of Kṛṣṇa, a similarly embroidered blue cloth in the case of Balarāma. These cover the bare torso both back and front and are known as "buku wali" and "pithiyal." The headgear consists of a *tiara* and peacock feathers.

The kings and warriors as well as other human characters are dressed once again in costumes which can be dated. They are ornate and almost gaudy. On the tight pyjama

is worn a multiple skirt which comes down to the knees. This is a distant cousin of the "Katakacini" which we come across in Vraj rāsa. On top is worn a heavily studded waistcoat all glittering and shining with glass, mica and the like, almost of the kind actors of Jātrā and Purulia Chau wear. Turbans and headgears complete the costume.

The costumes of the men actors playing women's roles are carefully planned so as to create an acceptable illusion. On top of a *sārī* or an Assamese "mekhalā" are worn artificial breasts and artificial hair much in the manner as seen in Kṛṣṇaṭṭam in Kerala. Ornaments comprise bracelets (*kharu*), necklaces, earings and the rest. Make-up is heavy with collyrium, vermilion marks, etc.

Some other characters such as Rāvaṇa, Brahmā, Garuḍa, Mārīcha and others wear masks (*mukha*). The buffoon or jester called the "behuwa" who is occasionally introduced into the performance in the beginning, also wears a mask. The masks are made of clay, bamboo, wood or cloth and are painted with lime, vernnilion, yellow, indigo, lamp black, etc. Some inmates of the Sattra, whose hereditory vocation it is, are in special charge of preparing masks and are called the 'Khanikars.'

However, despite the high degree of sophistication and stylization achieved in masks and costumes and in the manner the dance and song items are executed, certain element of grossness may be detected in the occasional introduction (on to the acting area) of oversize models, effigies, props and the like. At times, chariots, hills, mountains, elephants and even the serpent demon Kāliya in person are dragged on to the stage. While all this is impressive, it is incongruous with the style and techniques of acting, singing and dancing. Into an otherwise Nāṭyadharmī style are introduced definite elements of the Lokadharmī tradition. When and how these conventions came to be introduced and who was their originator, is a story untold.

A single Bhāonā performance thus combines harmoniously diverse elements of culture, which is why it is difficult to apply to it readymade classifications like *Mārgī* or *Deśī,* or Nāṭyadharmi or Lokadharmi. As we have repeatedly stated, it is typical of the Indian cultural phenomenon that a dramatic form identified with a particular region has often interesting links not only with genres and styles within the region, but also with those which have flourished outside that region. In the present case, the Bhāonā, because of its literary content and characteristic history, is clearly distinguishable from the Chau forms of Bengal and Orissa. But the use of Brajabauli has given it a larger Indian character and its Vaiṣṇava base has linked it with the Rāmalīlā and Rāsalila forms. On the other hand, its dramatic structure and mode of presentation are close parallels of the Bhāgavatamelā forms of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and to an extent even of the Jātrā forms of Bengal and Orissa. Its stage conventions follow the Sanskrit tradition in many respects and yet make significant departures. Again, its dance style and some aspects of its costuming have affinities with Manipuri, just as its musical content and technique are close to the Dhruvapada singing of Northern India.

And yet, it is by no means a mixture of all these: it has a distinct personality of its own, which is unquestionably Assamese, coherent and unique.

IX

THE RĀMĀYAṆA AND RĀMLĪLĀ

The traditions of the arts revolving around the Rāma theme present a complex picture which is characteristic not only of India but also of many parts of Asia. The theatre revolving around the theme is not an isolated art activity but is an aspect of the deep concerns of the people of India. Its multi-dimensional character and plurality of expression is witnessed at all levels of Indian society, be it rural, semi-urban or urban, mundane or religious, sacred or profane. It ranges from esoteric worship and ritualistic practices to banal street theatre to circus and acrobatic forms where Hanumān is a central figure. Indeed the theme has penetrated into many tribal societies. There is not a hamlet or a village, a district or a town where the theme is unknown. It is perennial, ever renewing, capable of contemporary interpretations, which go far beyond the momentary artistic or theatrical experience.

What then is meant when one speaks of the Rāmāyaṇa theatre? Like the Gaṅgā or the Himālayas, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have shaped the contours of the life and art of the peoples not only of India but also of South-East Asia. Its phenomenal spread throughout South-East Asia, Central Asia and China, and even Japan has been an enigma to art historians for many centuries. The genesis of the story goes back to 1000 B.C., or 800 B.C., and without doubt to a period prior to the date of Vālmīki's creation of the *Ramayaṇa*. A history of the Rāma theme from Vālmīki to its modern interpretation in different parts of India, South-East Asia, Central Asia, Mongolia, Iran, China, Japan and Sri Lanka can fill volumes. The creative works and the textual criticism are only one dimension of the pervasiveness of this captivating theme. There is an equally staggering preoccupation with the Rāma theme by artists, sculptors, wood-carvers, painters, musicians and dancers. From about the 4th century A.D. to contemporary times there has been a prolific depiction of the Rāma theme on walls of temples in India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. Most of these belong to the period from the 9th to the 13th centuries. It is followed by an equal preoccupation with the theme by painters of murals, scrolls and even weavers and printers of textiles.

The Rāma theme, therefore, is pervasive, not restricted to either the literary or the theatrical traditions. Also, the theatre of the Rāma theme must be considered against the background not only of literature and the development of the arts but against the backdrop of the value system which it represents and the ideals it places before

individuals for norms of human conduct. Consciously or unconsciously, every man aspires to be heroic like Rāma; sacrificing and self-denying like Lakṣmaṇa; calm, objective, selfessly devoted like Hanumān; and every woman faithful and courageous like Sītā. The characters of the story are household words in India, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and to a large extent even Burma.

There is no question of making demarcation between the literate and illiterate in this sphere, for many a time a seeming illiterate will know the story and the words better and with a greater understanding of its value than the one who reads it only as an intellectual exercise. A person working in a field or factory or living in a slum or a poor house will know the story as much as a King or a Minister. In moments of deep crisis of life when choices have to be made and decision taken the characters of this epic along with those of the *Mahābhārata* arise in the minds of Asians as symbols of the forces of nature, represented in human form. The multi-dimensional validity of the myth, its meaning and form, has been responsible for shaping the psychic destinies of the Asian societies for many centuries. The arts and the theatre are aspects of this life concern and must be seen as integral parts of the reality of life and not leisure time entertainment without social or moral purpose, or mere recounting of historical fact. Its historicity, if any, is the least of the psychical concers: it is the power of the myth which capitvates.

In purely artistic terms the Rāmalīlā or the Rāma theme appears in many ways and many forms throughout India. The simplest and the most popular form is the Kathā or the Kathākāra who recites the theme either as pure recitation or as the sung word. This Kathākāra is known to all parts of India. Sometimes he is called just a Kathākāra, sometimes a Rāma-Kathākāra or a Hari-Kathākāra. He is a professional singer, an artist who is a reciter, singer, musician, mono-actor and instrumentalist, all at once. In many villages and rural complexes the tradition of singing the *Rāmāyaṇa* serves the joint purposes of moral education and artistic communication. It is believed that the first reciters and narrators of the story were Lava and Kuśa themselves.

The individual singer may be equated to the mono-actor or the cultural animator of modern times because he has the fullest liberty to interpolate or paraphrase the text and give it any contemporary validity that he considers fit. In this respect the role of the individual singer or the Kathākāra is akin to the *Sūtradhāra* of the Sanskrit drama or even the *Vidūṣaka* of Kuṭiyaṭṭam and of other dance-drama forms. Sometimes the Kathākāra narrates; at other times he enacts; and yet at other times he sings or plays an instrument. He comments freely on contemporary situations like the 'Tolana' of Kuṭiyaṭṭam in Kerala; the level of the comment is determined by his back-ground and training and the audience to whom he communicates.

This Kathākāra or ballad singer was, no doubt, the precursor of the character-actor of the theatre. The tradition lives not only in villages but also in urban centres throughout India.

Every region has its particular form of ballad singing and recitation sessions. The singer is a solo or mono-actor who narrates, sings and acts and interprets a story, sometimes with a book in hand or often without it. The *Rāmāyaṇa* or Rāmakathā is the

indispensable part of the repertoire of the mono-singer-actor, although in certain regions of India it has given place to other folktales and stories ranging from the mythological to the heroic. Today it has also given place to social and political satire.

A form of ballad singing known as Dāsakāṭhiā is prevalent in Orissa. Its name is derived from the wooden clappers used as the sole musical accompaniment called the Dāsakāṭhi or Rāma Tāli. The themes are drawn from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The text used is the Oriya *Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa*. Other Oriya versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are also used by the ballad singers, such as that of Balarāmadāsa and the *Daṇḍī Rāmāyaṇa*. The story of the birth of Sītā resembles the Thai and Malaysian versions where she is cast away by Rāvaṇa. The dates of composition of all these versions are 16th century and often new interpolations have continued to be added. The ballad singer uses metres known as 'Chanda', 'Cautisā' and 'Caupadī' and the compositions are set to a few Indian modes known as Lava and Vṛtta.

In Andhra Pradesh another form of ballad singing known as the Burrakathā is prevalent. This is also a narration presented by a mono-actor or a group of three singers. Powerful direct narration is the characteristic feature of this recital. The repertoire invariably includes the singing of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* which this time is a Telugu version known as the *Dvipada Rāmāyaṇa* or the Raṅganātha *Rāmāyaṇa,* a composition of the 12th century. The *Dvipada Rāmāyaṇa* takes its name from the metrical patterns used. Many departures from the Vālmīki version are noticed here: the character of Lakṣmṇa assumes great importance. At the time of Rāma's banishment, he asks for two boons: the first, sleep for his wife Urmila for fourteen years, the period of exile: the second, a continuous vigil and waking of fourteen years for himself. Both are granted. Another version refers to Lakṣmṇa drawing seven protective lines, instead of one, around Sītā before he leaves her to find Rāma. The same version contains a graphic description of Indrajit, son of Rāvaṇa, and his wife Sulocanā. Indrajit is a minor character in other Indian versions, though in the South-East Asian versions he assumes great importance. The Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* of Raṅganātha may well provide a clue to the sources of several episodes of some of the Javanese and Malaysian *Rāmāyaṇa* versions.

Similar recitation, singing and mono-acting traditions are prevalent in other parts of India, each drawing upon particular regional versions of the epic. The Veeragasey ballad singers of Mysore use the 16th century Kannada *Rāmāyaṇa* of Toravai: occasionally they draw upon the *Pampā Rāmāyaṇa.* The ballad singers of Kerala use the Malayalam version of either *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* or often the text of *Campu Rāmāyaṇa;* rarely does he use Rāmanaṭṭam used as text for Kathākali. The Tamil reciters lean heavily on the Kamba *Rāmāyaṇa* of the 9th or 12th century, which also constitutes the base for contemporary *Rāmāyaṇa* versions in Bharatanāṭyam. Interestingly enough, it is also the basis of the Kerala shadow theatre revolving around the *Rāmāyaṇa* called *Tolapava Koothu.* The Bengali ballad singers use Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* which has strong resemblances to the Thai and Burmese versions. While the *Rāmāyaṇa* singing has gone out of vogue in Kashmir, a 18th century version of the epic in Kashmiri was popular until the forties of this century. However, of all the *Rāmāyaṇa* versions thus narrated, the most

important is the one in Hindi by Tulasīdāsa, which is recited, sung and acted in all parts of North India. The work assumes an importance second only to the original Vālmīki version and equal to Kamban's in South India. The Rāmalīlā of Varanasi and the several types of the cycle and pageant plays, performed in every village and city of Northern India in October-November, closely adhere to the Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa*.

Shadow Theatre and Puppet Forms

The shadow theatre and puppet theatre of all varieties — rod, glove, marionette — are active in India. What it may lack in refinement and sophistication, it gains in variety and vitality when compared to the contemporary traditions of shadow theatre of the Wayang Kulit, or the Nang Sbek, or Nang Yai of Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia or Thailand. The wooden rod puppets of the Wayang Golek type and marionettes of the Burmese type are found in different parts of India. The *Rāmāyaṇa* or Rāma-kathā, with its innumerable regional variants of story, text, singing, instrumental accompaniment and form of execution, has also dominated the shadow and puppet theatre of India. Indeed, the vitality of the forms has been found to be so great that contemporary choreographers continue to employ them for depicting modern themes.

In Orissa the shadow theatre is known as Rāvaṇa Chāyā, literally meaning shadow of Rāvaṇa. The puppets are small, cut in unpainted hide and leather, and project silhouette and profile shadows. Although they have no independent articulation for the limbs, they are effective on account of the great skill of the manipulators. The counterpart of the ballad singer of the Dāsākaṭhiā or the 'dalang' of the Indonesian Wayang Kulit, is the reciter-manipulator or the Rāvaṇa Chāyā. He is also a polyvalent artist, singing: manipulating and dancing behind the small screen. The text used is the Oriya *Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa,* as in the Dāsakāṭhiā.

The Tholu Bomalattam, meaning leather puppet-dance, is a visual representation through large coloured puppets of the Burrakatha of Andhra Pradesh. The text of the plays is drawn from the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* version. The form of the puppets resembles the medieval murals of the Vijayanagara period: the shadows are gigantic and compare favourably with the Nang Sbek.

The Karnataka shadow theatre (called literally, leather puppet-dance) is another visual representation of the Kannada *Rāmāyaṇa.* Here the puppets are not as large as in the Bomalattam of Andhra Pradesh; sometimes a whole scene with one single puppet projects a static picture. The static pictures and single puppets are used as link devices between dynamic dramatic scenes, which results in smooth transitions between scenes. The shadow theatre of Karnataka revolving around the Rāma theme, is closely related to Rāma play presented as wooden puppets. The wooden puppets resemble the Yakṣagāna, and the marionette theatre is indeed only another aspect of the live theatre in all the regions. The ballad singing, the shadow and puppet theatre, and the live theatre are closely related to each other: mutual influences and borrowings between genres are frequent. A common text and a near identical musical accompaniment along with allied patterns of costuming, decor and facial make-up give them a distinctive regional

character. Kerala and Tamil Nadu also have their respective shadow and puppet theatre. The Kerala shadow known as Tholapavu Koothu (leather puppet-play) is a cyclic presentation of the Rāma story to the accompaniment of the recited and sung verse of the Kamban *Rāmāyaṇa*. An elaborate ritual precedes the actual performance. The puppet play of Tamil Nadu also follows the Kamban *Rāmāyaṇa* or other folk versions.

Examples could be added. It is not necessary to attempt in this study a detailed analysis of each form and its comparison with forms existing in other parts of India and South-East Asia. Suffice it to say that even this brief enumeration will convince a discerning observer of the traditions of Indian performing arts that the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme lives and vibrates in many forms and styles.

While the ballad singers, shadow and puppet theatre may well belong to rural India and oral traditions, there are other aspects of the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre which are closely connected with developments in literature. This theatre is yet another example of the Indian cultural phenomenon where the sophisticated and seemingly unsophisticated forms are all united through the recited and sung word, cutting across socio-economic stratifications and insulation. A continual dialogue takes place between different levels of society and amongst different forms of art through the vehicle of theatre.

The Rāmalīlā in North India is one such important theatrical genre which provides an opportunity for the young and old, rich and poor to come together for 16 to 20 days preceeding the Dussehra to witness this vast pageant of human life. The dramatic spectacle varies from place to place but everywhere two elements are common: the first is the theme which by and large is selected from the *Rāmācaritamānasā* of Tulasīdāsa (may be with either slight or marked deviations); and the other is a tableaux-like framework where one moves from one static picture to the other. Scholars have been of the view that Vālmīki, in making Lava and Kuśa sing the *Rāmāyaṇa,* was himself the originator of the first dramatic spectacle. While Lava and Kuśa may well have been the precursors of the Kathākāras, it is unlikely that the origins of what are known as the *lilā* former can be traced to Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In tracing the history of the *līlā* forms, it may be necessary to have a fresh look at the Sanskrit literature of the ancient period. One may also need to examine the development which took place in Apabhramsa literature, the early beginnings in Maithili and the Saṅgīta-nāṭaka traditions known to Nepal and Assam.

In an earlier chapter we have referred to the development in the 10th-11th century of the evolution of the Uparūpakas and the prominent place given to them in the works of Sāradātanaya and Bhoja. We have also referred to the fact that classical Sanskrit *nāṭaka* traditions gave rise to a form which was known as the Saṅgītaka. Rājaśhekara's *Karpūramañjarī* is the culmination of this new development and the author rightly calls his play a *Sattaka*. These medieval developments in turn resulted in the emergence of metrical forms in regional languages which we have already referred to in the context of our discussion on Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Bhāgvatamelā, Yakṣagāna, etc. The main features of the literary developments were the emergence of new dramatic forms and the use of distinctive regional metres. In Eastern Northern India, apart from the Saṅgītaka, there

was an Apabhraṁśa *nāṭaka* both of the Jaina and Hindu traditions. In this also, music and dance played an important part. There was also the very significant development of a form of composition known as *caryāgīti* in Bengal. Perhaps it was *caryāgīti* which to some extent served as a model for Jayadeva for his *Gīta-Govinda.* The *Gīta-Govinda,* while a purely lyric piece with its mystical impact, had immense possibilities of theatrical and dramatic presentation. Its sensuous form made it immediately popular and pervasive. Umāpati and Vidyāpati followed close on the heels of Jayadeva. Forms of poetry sung and recited, began to be known in different parts of India. In the 15th and 16th centuries appeared two other major Vaiṣṇava poets and saints, Cāṇḍidāsa and Caitanya, who contributed in no small measure not only to the popularization of the Kṛṣṇa theme but also to the evolution of theatrical modes which were to take deep roots in the whole of medieval India.

While the temple, the temple courtyard, the village square and the streets were venues of the Rāma theatre in other parts of India, in North India evolved a form which has been described by some critics as the cycle play. Perhaps the cycle play is the closest English equivalent to describe this theatrical spectacle, which was and is seen in the forms roughly known as the *līlās* in North India. However, when closely analysed, there is nothing in common between the cycle plays of early Christianity such as the miracle and mystery plays and those which are described as the *līlās* revolving round the life of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa.

The *līlās* have a long history in Indian thought and literature. From the point of view of mysticism and theology, the concept of *līlās* represents the multiplicity of forms *(rūpa)* of that which is in the last analysis beyond form and unmanifest *(parā-rūpa or arūpa).* It is repetitive and cyclic in nature with purpose. Through repetitive recurrence it seeks to communicate the central concept, namely that the plurality of forms ultimately coalesces into a still centre which is intangible. In literature, it gave rise to many genres, including those where different episodes with lives of the God incarnate were delineated so as to communicate an abstract idea in concrete terms.

The literary mode permeated and transformed the epical structure of early drama. The narrative did not move through a sustained story; instead, it was the presentation of different episodes revolving round a particular incarnation. Perhaps this was a natural development of the *Daśāvatāra* concept and the form called *Prabandha* which was perfected by Jayadeva. Two very distinct traditions of the *līlā* became evident in the field of theatre in the North, East and West India. The first belonged to the West to Saurashtra, Gujarat and a part of Maharashtra and the second to Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Bengal. While in Gujarat and Saurashtra it was the Kṛṣṇa theme which captured the imagination of people at all levels of society, it became popular. However, the Kṛṣṇa theme also enjoyed great popularity, as it does to this day, to Mathura and Vrindavan and of course Manipuri.

In the present-day Uttar Pradesh there are two flourishing traditions of the līlās, one known as the Kṛṣṇa or Rāsalilā and the other *Rāmalīlā*.

Practically every town and every village celebrate the advent of autumn not only as

a harvesting season but also as an occasion to recreate the life of Rāma. The presentation of the latter lasts many days and is always serialised, each episode being presented on one night and the conclusion being celebrated with the burning of the effigy of Rāvaṇa. The Hindi-speaking region presents a vast variety of Rāmāyaṇa traditions. A superficial view gives the impression that they all follow in the main the Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa, though when looked at closely, it becomes obvious that Tulasi Rāmāyaṇa is a loose peg on which many a local version of the Rāmāyaṇa is hung. All these versions are post-16th century. The Hill regions of Kumaon have their own versions, while people from the interior of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan follow other versions. In this study it will be impossible even to enumerate the different Rāmāyaṇa versions as found in various parts of the Hindi-speaking region or even to identify literary versions as distinct from oral traditions prevalent in the area.

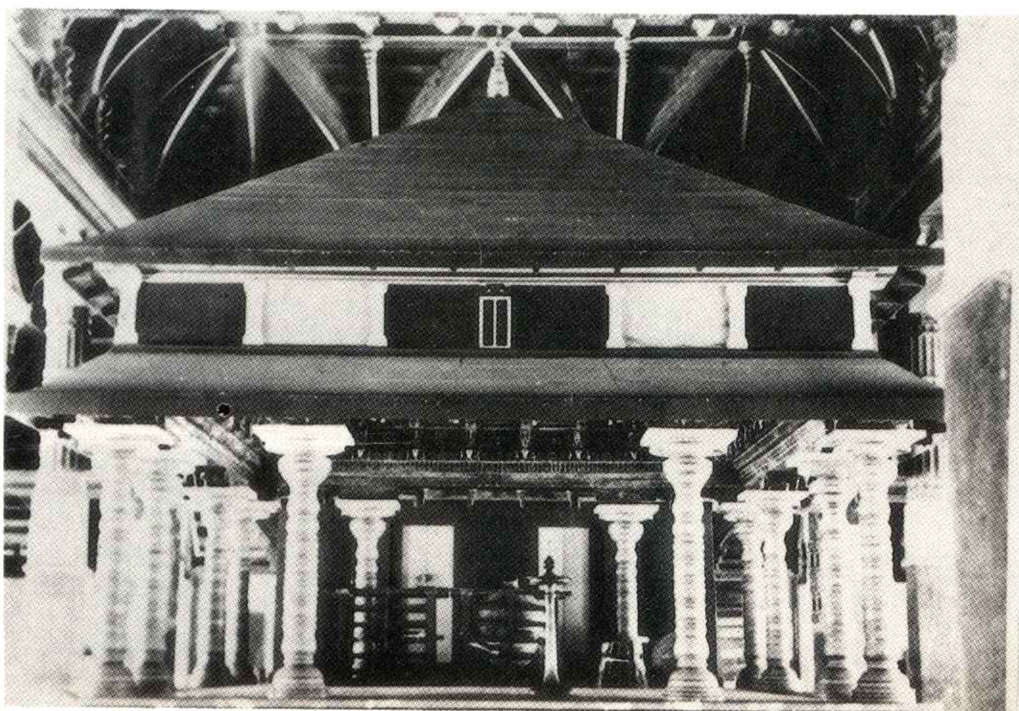
In dramatic terms, artistically the most significant and the most spectacular is the Rāmāyaṇa performed in Varanasi. The Varanasi or the Ramnagar Rāmāyaṇa is a spectacle which is not only cyclical in nature like all other *līlās* but is also changing locale theatre. In Burma there is the tradition called the Nibhatkin presenting on bullock-carts pageants with still tableaux. In other countries also there are similar traditions.

The origins of the Varanasi Rāmalīlā can perhaps be traced back to the ancestors of the present Mahārājā of Ramnagar who were the patrons of this theatrical spectacle. Since it rests so heavily on the Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa, obviously we cannot trace the origins further back than the 16th century. Such evidence as is found in minature paintings and portions of Vraj and Avadhī poetry, lead us to conclude that the Rāmāyaṇa as a serialized play was very popular by the late 16th century and early 17th century. There are more than six complete sets of the Rāmāyaṇa paintings found in Varanasi, Rajasthan and Gujarat which show a close affinity between what we see today in Varanasi and what must have been practised in the 16th and the 17th centuries. The changing locales of mobile theatre and representations in the paintings of different episodes in distinct squares or areas, sequentially drawn, each delineating a particular episode. Also, this type of presentation is one step forward from the pure static tableau form known as the Jhāṅkī. The static tableau type of picture becomes dynamic by moving from one locale to the other.

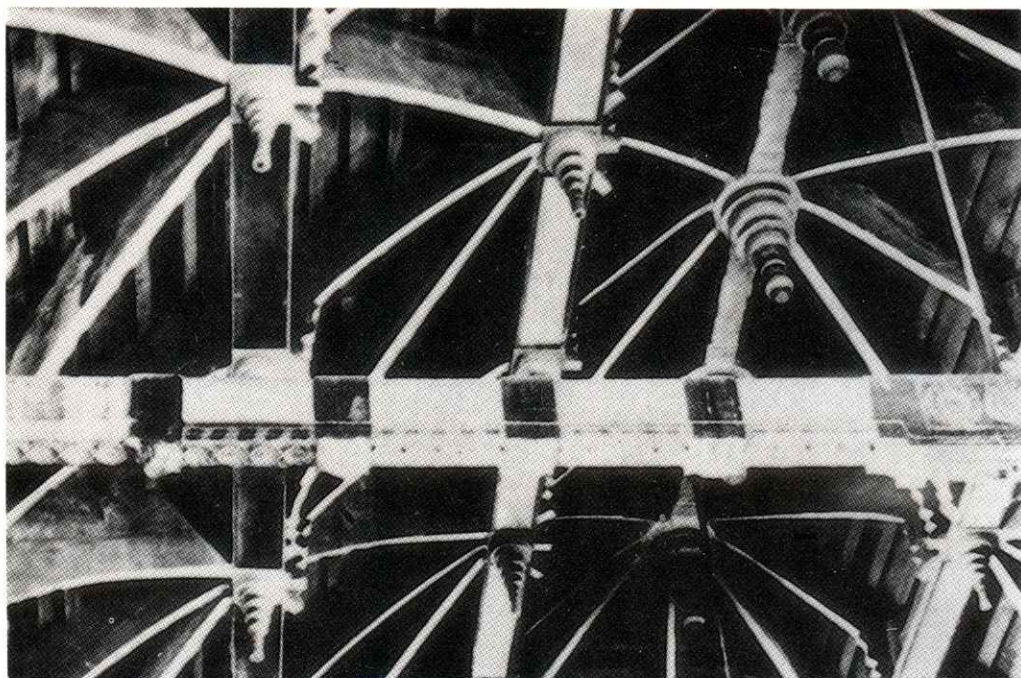
Before we describe the spectacle itself, let us see the milieu and the level of society at which this is popular. We are no longer with the Bhāgavatars of Yakṣagāna, the Bhāgavātālus of Andhra Pradesh; neither are we with the Bhumijs, the Muras and the toms of the Chau forms. In Varanasi it is an urban Hindu society which performs the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a collective community effort. All classes and castes cooperate in the preparations, but distinct roles are assigned to different sections of this society and community. The patrons continue to be local kings and the present Mahārājā of Varanasi directs and guides all preparations personally. The performers are not necessarily Brahmins or people chosen from any particular caste. Their only qualification must be that as far as heroes and heroines are concerned, specially Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, they must be played by young boys under the age of 14. In fact, this is a feature which



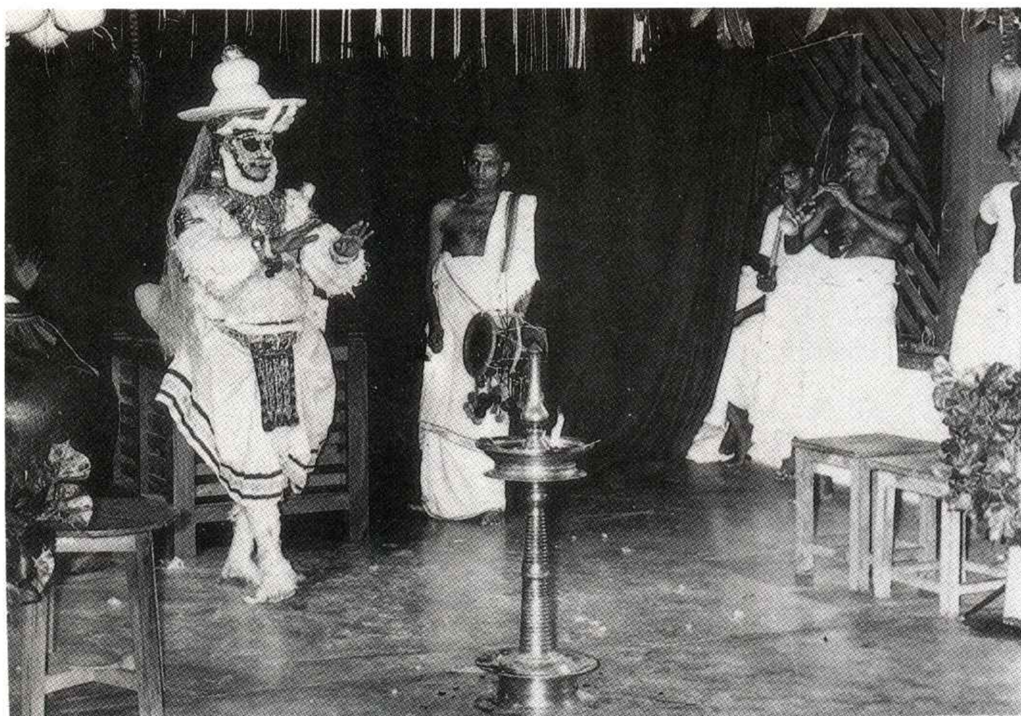
Kuṭṭambalam of Vaṭakkunathan Kuṭṭambalam (outside view)



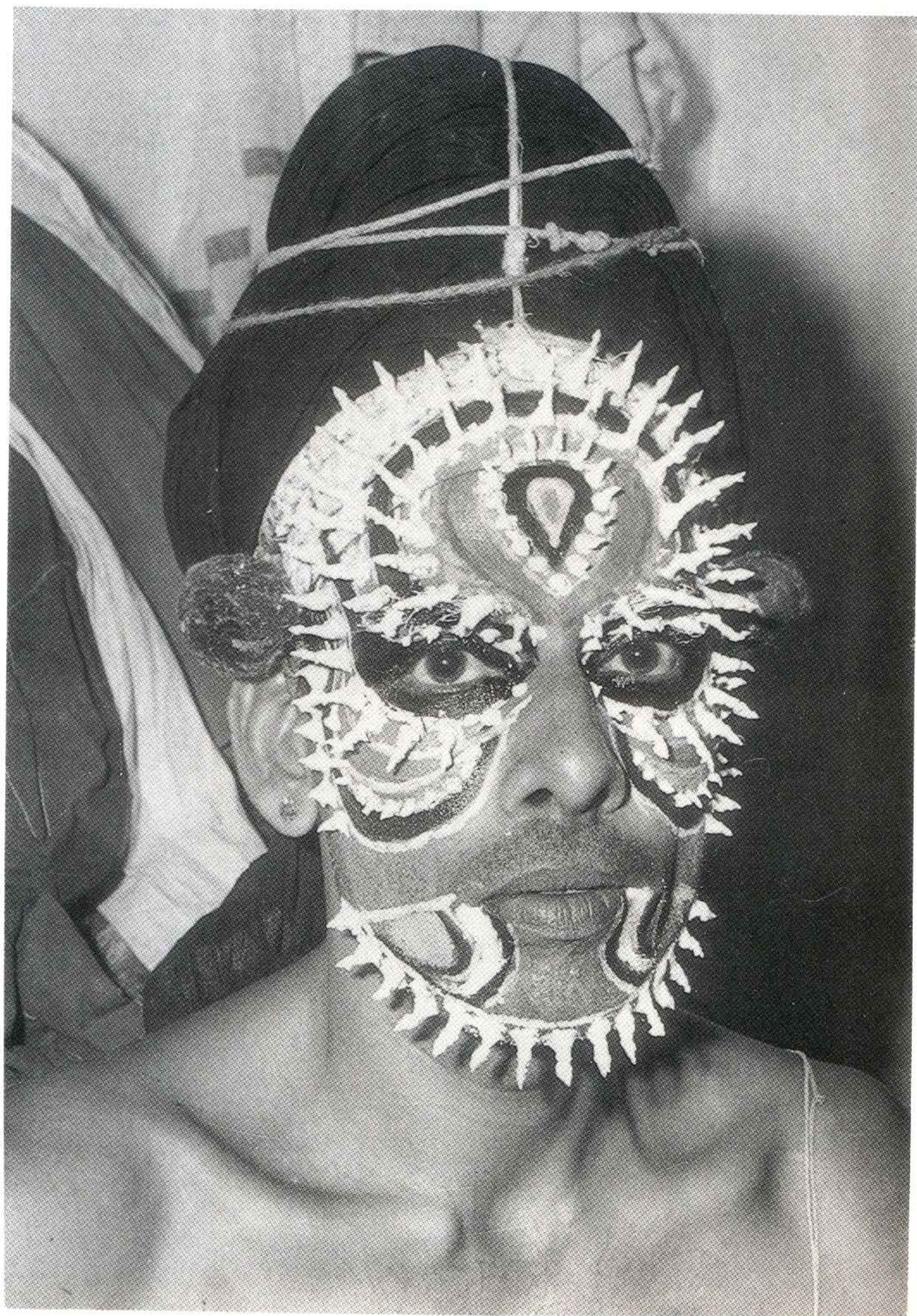
Kuṭṭambalam of Vaṭakkunathan Temple, Trichur (inside view)



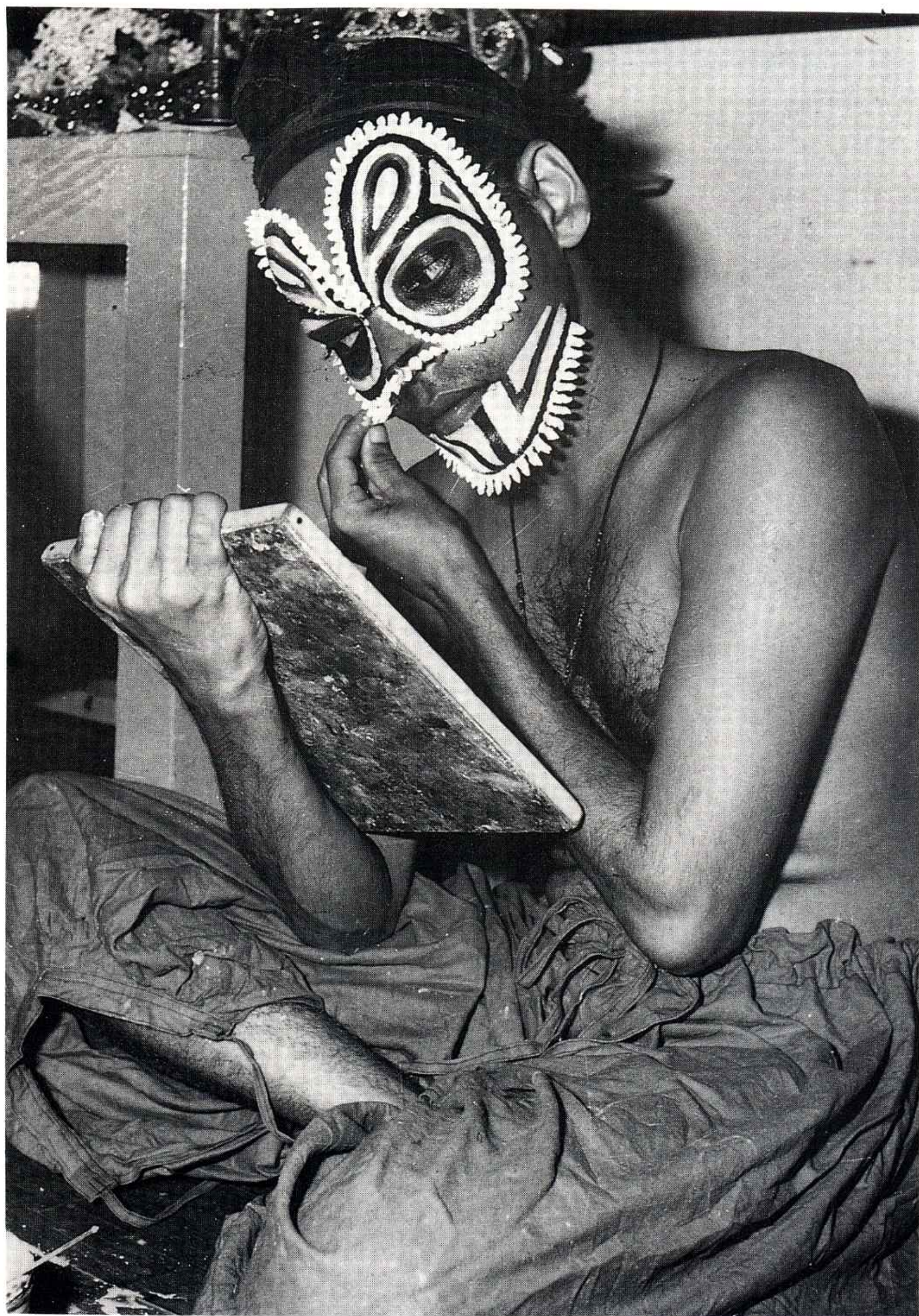
Kuṭṭambalam Roof Trelis



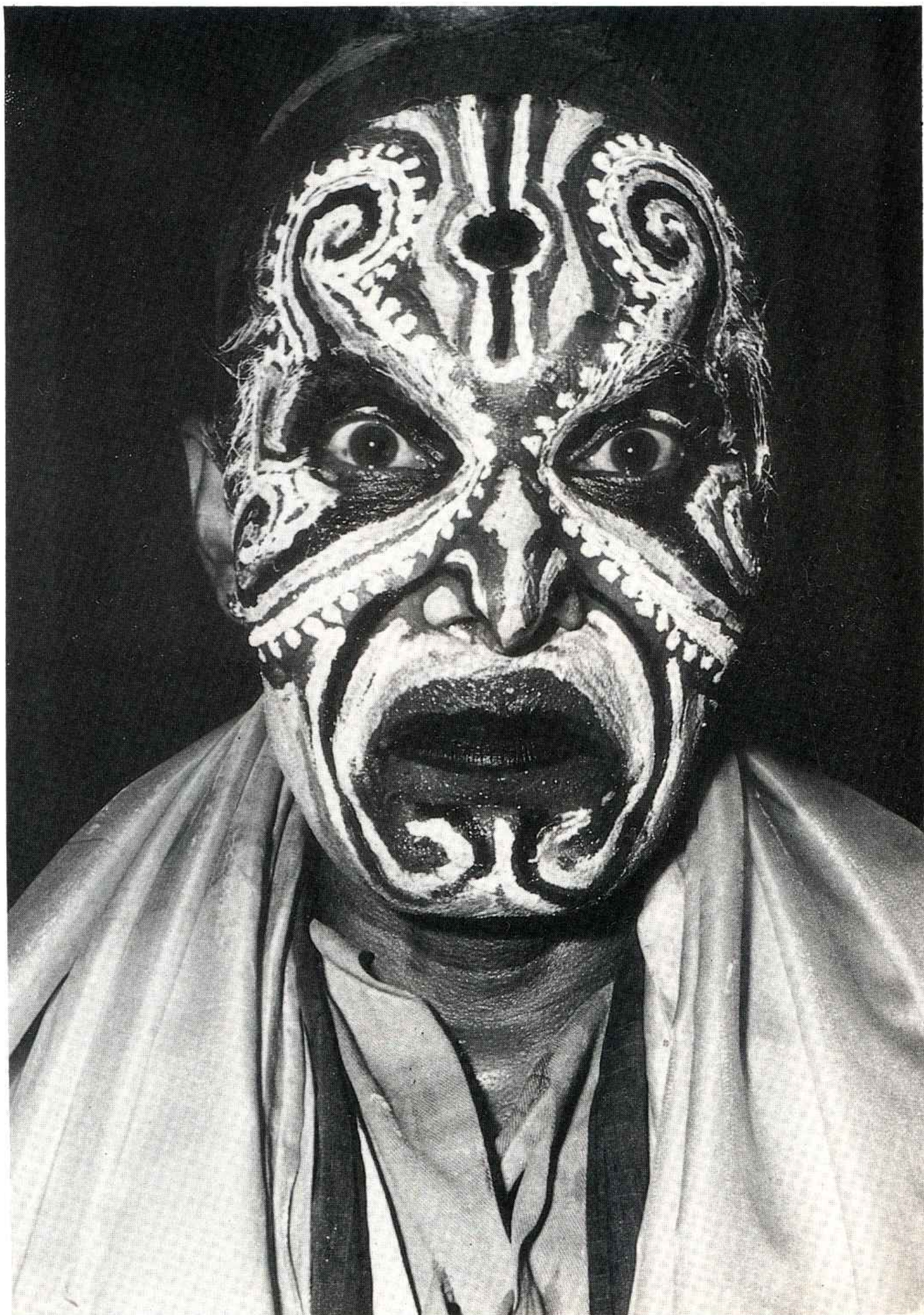
Kuṭiyaṭṭam: Hanumāna



Make-up of a Yakṣagāna Artist



Make-up of a Yakṣagāna Artist



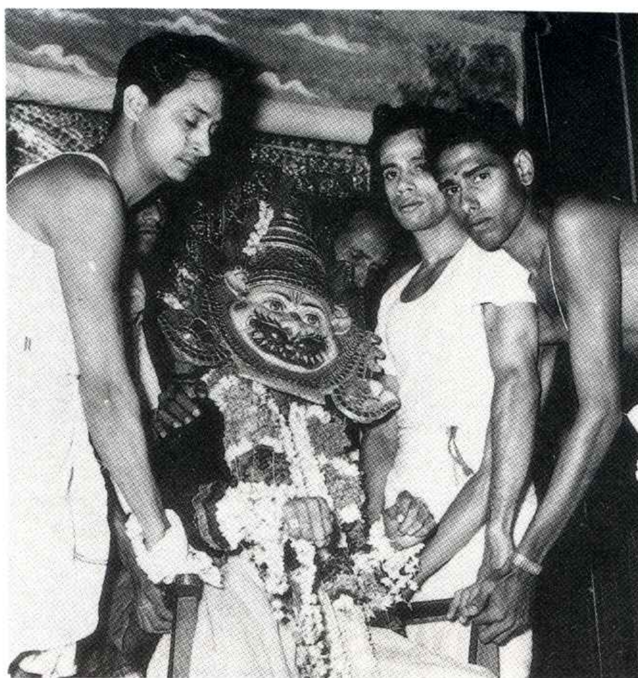
Make-up of a Yakṣagāna Artist



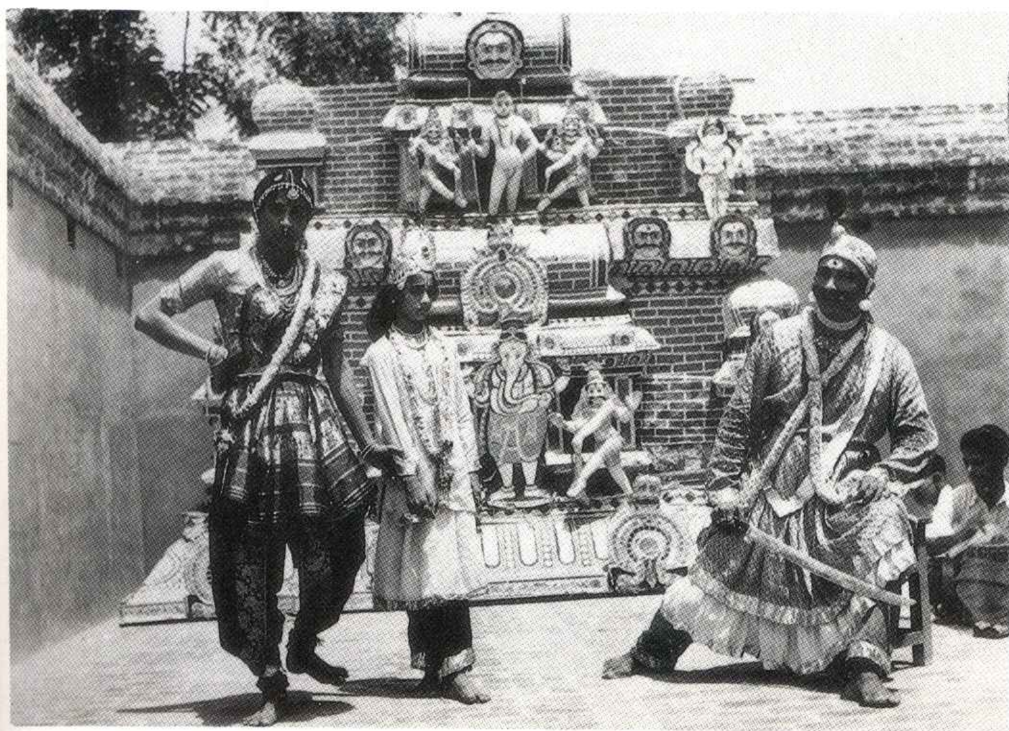
Preparing the Muṇḍāsu



Yakṣagāna Performance



Narasiṁha in Bhāgavatamelā



Hiraṇyakaśipu and Prahlādam in Bhāgavatamelā



The Mask of Seraikala



Sun in Candrabhāgā



Candrabhāgā



Kartikeya in Mayurbhanj Chau



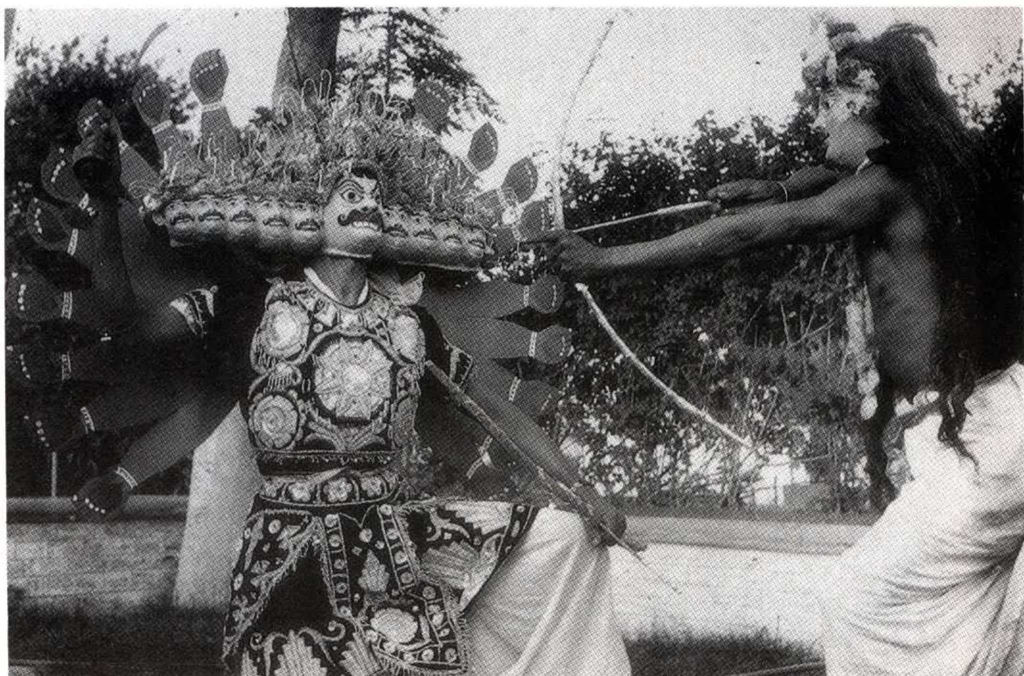
Shiva's Tāṇḍava by Shri Hari



Gosinga: A Weird Character



The Killing of Mahiṣāsura, Puruliā Chau



Rāma-Rāvaṇa Duel in Puruliā Chau



Hanumāna in Rāmanagar's Rāmāyaṇa



Hanumāna in Rāmanagar's Rāmāyaṇa: Another View



Rāma in Rāmanagar's Rāmāyaṇa



Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa in Rāmanagar's Rāmāyaṇa



Kṛṣṇa's Rāsalīlā



Kṛṣṇa as Mākhanchor in the Līlānāṭaka



Preparation of the Yātrā inside the Green Room



A Comic Interlude in Khayāla, Rajasthan



Tamāśā



Tamāśā



Tamāśā

is common to all the *līlā* forms in India. Young boys under 14 are chosen invariably to enact the roles of the deities. Only in Manipur in the Rāsalīlā performances do girls under 14, instead of boys, enact the roles. In either case the message is clear: innocence, virginity and celibacy are essential prerequisites of the actor-dancer before he or she represents the character of the God. We also notice that what may be termed as purely religious and what can be called secular, both come together in a setting of this type. While there is no community demarcation or hierarchy, there is a very definite system of choosing persons who would play the roles of the consecrated or the anointed deities. Other characters are chosen on the basis of their suitability and skill as musicians, dancers, declaimers, reciters, etc. In the course of time, certain people began to specialize in the roles of certain characters. Thus, there is a community Rāvaṇa or a community Vibhīṣaṇa or a community Dasaratha. The roles of Rāma, Sītā and Lakśmaṇ have, however, to be changed after every two or three years, as the young boys reach puberity. This is a feature common to the presentation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in many other parts of Asia. In practically all regions of Indonesia there continues to be a convention of choosing young boys or girls to play the part of Rāma, Lakśmaṇa and Sītā while other characters continue to be portrayed by people who have been playing the roles for many years. Both in Varanasi and in other parts of India and Asia, all these actors are not professional like the Bhāgavatārs or the Chau dancer. They are invariably amateurs with other occupations and functions. The milieu is both rural and urban where many professions and occupations are represented.

Ten days before the Dussehra the body of the main actor is anointed and decorated and he is consecrated as a God when the last detail of putting a *tilaka* on his forehead has been completed. During the time he wears a light and sophisticated make-up, he is expected to transform himself from a mere human to an incarnation of a deity. Perhaps the make-up helps in doing this because there is only a slight flour veneer and on this are drawn patterns of cut-out tinsel which remind him of paintings and drawings he has seen of the deity. His eye-brows and eyes are again transformed into an icon. There is nothing earthly about this character. Lakśmaṇa and Sītā, similarly, are incarnations in human form. Once the rites of consecration are gone through, there is a strict discipline to which the consecrated actor must be followed long before the actual performance. As has been remarked before, the Varanasi *Rāmāyaṇa* follows fairly closely the text of *Rāmācaritamānasa.* It is primarily a recitative *Rāmāyaṇa* which uses a wide variety of metrical forms. The actors of the Rāmalīlā, therefore, are mainly good reciters, declaimers and mimes rather than great dancers. The episodes chosen do not present the earlier life of Daśaratha but begin with the birth of Rāma. All through, the emphasis is on the God-incarnate aspect of Rāma. Each episode is presented in a different locale of the town, one section of which is transformed into the palace of Ayodhyā and another into the woods of Kiṣkindhā; the third becomes Laṅkā, the fourth Mithilā, and so on. For the 10 or 12 days the play lasts, the whole town is transformed into the world of Rāma, Lakśmaṇā, Sītā and Rāvaṇa and hardly anyone in the town mentions a locality by its ordinary name. A performance which can involve an entire community so completely for a duration of

10 to 15 days would naturally have a social dimension apart from its entertainment aspects. A cohesive brotherhood is created among the citizens through the transformation of the city into locations of another era. All members of the society are identified with that period, with those other cities and locales which belonged to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and not with the present-day Varanasi. The device of inter-linking the mythical part or historical periods with contemporaneity is known to many theatrical modes of India, but each region uses a different device. We had observed that in the case of the Bhāgavatamelā tradition the *Vidūṣaka* connected the past and the present; in the case of Rāmalīlā it is the venue itself which becomes the connecting link.

Each section of the city constructs raised platforms or transforms streets or terraces or gardens, as the case may be, into palaces, woods and streams. The whole city is the stage, the arena of the performance. Unities of time and space in the linear sense so meaningful and valid in the western context are totally irrelevant here. The 'happenings' of contemporary *avant-garde* theatre find their finest models in this pattern of changing locales. The play moves sequentially day after day and the audience moves with it from locale to locale. Naturally, Rāma is ever present and therefore even in episodes where he personally does not appear, the God-incarnate intervenes to remind the audience that the spectacle they see is only one of His manifestations. The audience is lifted out of temporal time to a totally different dimension. A better example of a willing suspension of disbelief would be hard to find.

Another feature of this play is that the text is declaimed, with loud operations and recitations directed by the chief narrator, the Vyāsa. He is the carry-forward of the Kathākāra known to all other parts of India. But here he must also use an acute sense of discrimination and discretion so that there are no overlaps and that a continuity is maintained between one episode presented on a particular day and another which follows. Since the text is so important, there is hardly any word to song or that word-sound-gesture relationship typical of the highly developed South Indian forms. Nevertheless, there is great variety, in the declamation, recitation and singing. The "Caupāis" and the "Sorathas" of Tulasīdāsa are like the *Campu* forms of Telugu and Kannada poetry. They can be metrically recited or set to musical melody. The audience is often spellbound by the metre skill of the narrator-musician who links one episode with the other. The actors in turn are highly trained reciters of the Tulasī *Rāmacaritamānasa* and know their text remarkably well. A careful selection of the episodes is made specially because it would be impossible to recite the whole of Tulasī *Rāmacaritamānasa.* Today thus different Gosvāmīs or Vyāsas choose different episodes from the text. Obviously there is little scope here for improvisation of the type we noticed in Yakṣagāna, although there is evidence of some improvisation in the sequences where Rāma fights Rāvaṇa or Vālī, Sugrīva of when Kumbhakarṇa wakes up from his long slumber.

Tulasīdāsa had looked at his Rāma as an infallible person, incapable of making any mistakes and thus every act is justified. The Rāmalīlā of Varanasi follows this interpretation closely. The episodes relating to the return of Bharata to Ayodhya, the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, and the conflict between Vālī and Sugrīva and finally the positions taken by

the allies of Rāvaṇa are interpreted differently in different parts of India, thus providing different interpretations of the same characters. For example. unlike the Purulia Chau, the Varanasi Sītā is a perfect symbol of Indian womanhood, patient and ultimately banished on account of a suspicion. The folk versions of the *Rāmayaṇa* in contrast present her as a more human character who argues, stands up occasionally for her rights and is ultimately banished not on account of rumours which may harm the State but on account of a misplaced jealousy of Rāma.

The musical accompaniment is minimal but effective. There is either an all—powerful and important singer or groups of singers who sing, unfortunately, to the harmonium. There is the percussionist, usually the pakhawāj player, sometimes replaced now by the tablā player. There is the *nagara* and there are cymbals and *jhānjh*. Wind instruments such as the *śehnāi* and the *turahi* are used frequently. However, in deep contrast to everything that happens in the Chau forms, it is the vocalist or group of vocalists alone who guides and determines the entire musical structure of the performance. There is a remarkable synchronisation between the singers and the declaimers and actors. The last battle scenes are held in another part of Varanasi providing the climax. Naturally, large open spaces are required for these fights and killings with bows and arrows, and these scenes are presented to the accompaniment or loud drumming and śehnāi playing but no vocal singing.

While the costumes of Rāma, Sītā and Lakśmaṇa are simple, naturalistic and none of these characters wear masks, other characters like Hanumān, Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa all wear masks which are quite different from anything we noticed in the context of Seraikala and Purulia Chau. Made of cloth and not of wood or clay, these masks are soft, worn laterally oil the face and tied at the back by strings. The mask of Rāvaṇa is a flat lateral mask made with silver or gold embroidery and with ten heads also embroidered on a single piece of cloth. The mask of Hanumān, in contrast, is of metal. Nowhere else than here do we find Hanumān wearing a golden metal mask, large and impressive, a fact which may mean that perhaps by the time of Tulasīdāsa the character of Hanumān had acquired qualities of divinity.

Such conventions of presenting the same character with or without a mask have parallels in other parts of Asia, particularly in the versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* known to Thailand. In the Khon tradition, the demons and the simians wear masks, though the heroes and deities are without them. The Ramalila of Varanasi is a close parallel of the South-East Asian traditions in this respect, though a distinctively North Indian form in othel respects.

Scholars are not unanimous about the history of presentation of this *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Rāmacaritamānasa* as a theatrical spectacle. Some think that the first performance of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* as Rāmalīlā can be traced back to a disciple of Tulsīdāsa who lived in or about 1625. According to some others, however, it was a temple architect called Nārāyaṇadāsa was the first to present the performance after having received orders in a dream to do so. The visualization of this dream is enacted each year in Varanasi at Nattimli. In the dream, apparently, Nārāyaṇadāsa was asked to recreate the episode

relating to Bharatamilāp. Other scholars have attributed the popularity of the *Rāmlīlā* as a theatre form to Nabhaji, the writer of the *Bhaktamāla,* and subsequently to Priyadāsa, disciple of Nabhaji and commentator on the *Bhaktamāla.* While all these varied interpretations do not give us any firm basis for establishing a definite date of the first theatrical spectacle based on the *Rāmacaritamānasa,* it is clear from the writings of many contemporaries of Tulsīdāsa and his followers that Tulsīdāsa was aware of several theatrical traditions of the Rāma theme which were popular in different parts of India and that the enactment of the *Rāmacaritamānasa* as *Rāmlīlā* must have begun. simultaneously with or immediately after the writing of the *Rāmacaritamānasa.*

In spite of a chequered history of *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre between the 16th and 18th centuries, it is evident that the origin of the Rāmalīlā of Ramnagar (Varanasi) is contemporaneous with the writing of the *Rāmacaritamānasa.* According to a legend an ancestor of the present Maharaja was ordered in a dream about 150 years ago to convert the city of Varanasi into the sites of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* The King was quite obviously taking recourse to a theatrical medium in order to establish communication with his population. He was recreating in tangible form a theme which was close to the faith of the people. We are familiar with similar dream sequences which inspired other kings in Kerala, Manipur, Lucknow or Orissa. The beginning of the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi in the 18th century, thus, has great sociological significance.

Here then is another illustration of the theatre medium used not only to bring different strata of society together but also for creating a sense of harmony and dialogue between the ruler and the ruled. Also, the Ramnagar Rāmalīlā moves on multiple levels, one invoking the eternal and the other relating to the here and now, constantly adjusting itself with the time to incorporate a contemporary reality.

X

RĀSALĪLĀ AND KṚṢṆALĪLĀ

While the temple and the temple-courtyard forms such as the Kuṭṭiyaṭṭam, Bhāgavata. mela and Yakṣagāna in South India have a long and sustained growth closely related to the developments in Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada literature, in North India evolved parallel literary and theatre forms which revolved around the themes of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma. These developments were not unrelated to happenings in South India and were roughly contemporaneous, particularly between the 15th and 18th centuries.

The history of dramatic forms in North India has also to be seen in relation to the literary activity in Eastern India, particularly Assam, Bengal and Bihar, as also in the Western Indian languages, i.e., Gujarati and Rajasthani. Indeed, the formative period of Assamese, Bengali, Maithili, early Gujarati etc. is the common backdrop of the Northern Indian theatrical forms which are today associated in the main with Vrajbhāṣā, Avadhī and Hindī.

As in some other parts of India, the diverse theatrical traditions. dependent on either the word or movement or sound are integral to literary developments even if today the generic class of theatrical spectacle revolving around Kṛṣṇa or Rāma is termed folk, or at best *Deśī*. The evolution of these forms finally has to be seen in close conjunction with the profuse activity in miniature painting which used the same thematic content through the medium of line and colour.

We must also remember that these medieval artistic developments were part and parcel of a pervasive wave of Vaiṣṇavism and the *Bhakti* movement which enveloped the whole country. The history of the varied streams of: the movement is too well known to need recapitulation.

Although the literary and theatrical developments are largely medieval, going back to the 14th and 15th centuries, their inspiration lay in sources which were ancient and in traditions which must have survived even if in a chequered fashion through the Sultanate period which is seemingly barren and dry in most parts of Eastern and Northern India. Indeed, it would not be too much to conclude that the renewed activity was feasible and possible only after the resumption of a comparatively more stable government under the Moghuls.

Apart from the many forms such as the Jātrā and the Aṇkiā nāṭa of Bengal and Assam respectively, there grew, as we have already discussed, another form of temple

ritual cum theatrical spectacle which has been roughly termed as the *līlā* or translated inadequately in English as the cycle plays revolving around the life of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

We have already seen how the *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre received a new impetus in the 15th century, apart from the important contribution of the Tamil and Malayalam versions of a slightly earlier period. The Kṛṣṇa theme was a parallel development, this time with Kṛṣṇa of the period prior to his departure from Mathura as the hero rather than Rāma.

As in the case of Rāma, the Kṛṣṇa theme can also be traced back to the earliest records of Indian history. Unlike the Rāma theme, however, there are two distinct and seemingly unrelated Kṛṣṇa themes which run through Indian thought, literature and arts. The first is the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavadgitā*, whether based on a thin nucleus of historical fact or myth, and the other, the younger Kṛṣṇa of Vrindavan and Mathura whose life is embodied in the *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, the appendix to the Mahābhārata. We have seen how the Rāma theme receives different treatment of content and form in different periods of Indian history in many languages and in drama, painting and music. We have also observed that the repertoire of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Bhāgavatamelā and Yakṣagaṇa revolved around themes drawn from the different versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and episodes of the *Mahābhārata*. The literature and artistic traditions revolving around the Kṛṣṇa of Vrindavan and Mathura constitute complementary tradition which is as strong and popular as the first. Its continuity can be traced through a period of twenty centuries and more, through the Purāṇas, *Nāṭakas* and *Kāvyas* of Sanskrit literature and through poetic and dramatic writings in various regional languages of India during the period from 12th to 19th centuries.

An understanding of the coexistence of these parallel streams is vital for comprehending the totality of the dramatic, dance and music traditions of India, not to speak of the diverse interpretations of the themes at the level of speculative thought, psychological interpretation and symbolic meaning. If the first type of epic narrative content provided the basis for norms of conduct and an understanding of that confrontation of the forces of good and evil which was undertaken as duty rather than power lust, the second represented man's eternal desire for union with the godhead that is intangible and beyond form. If the former represented a sphere of action and conduct having a dimension of horizontal activity, the second was suggestive of a similar sphere but having a vertical ascension. High powerful drama was the logical artistic mode in which the former could contain its grand architectonic content, while the lyrical repetitive cycle, in which the multiplicity of form all aspiring to merge with the godhead, formless and beyond form, was the logical outcome of the latter.

The Kṛṣṇalīlā was the acme of this second concern, which through its repetitive nature only reaffirmed the cyclicality of time and the eternal validity of the theme. The power of the latter lay in a myth which was psychically captivating and meaningful, rather than in the narration of historical fact.

It is significant that in terms of artistic expression, while the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* gave rise to the tradition of the Kathākaāras, Rāma-Kathās or the Harikathās, the Kṛṣṇa of Mathura and Vrindavan gave rise to the lyrical and devotional singing later

crystallised as the tradition of the *Kirtana* and bhajana, etc. The two were, of course, never mutually exclusive.

The concept of the *līlā* or more specifically Rāsalīlā is contained, as has been mentioned above, in the *Harivaṁśa,* the appendix to the *Mahābhārata.* The twentieth chapter of the *Vishṇu Parva* (i.e., Section II, Chapter 20) vividly describes the dance of the gopīs with Kṛṣṇa. The dance is held on a fullmoon night in the autumnal season. The gopīs, as if in a spell, come out and dance with the Lord. The main feature of the dance both from the text and Nilakaṇṭha's commentary appears to be a circular formation with two gopīs and Kṛṣṇa all dancing with interlocked hands. It would also appear from the *Harivaṁśa* that the *rāsa* was performed around a stout and smooth spike which was driven into the earth. The earliest reference to a circular form of dance can be found in a hymn of the *Ṛgveda* (10, 72.6) which describes the beginning of creation and where the *devas* are depicted as dancing in a circle. The *Harivaṁśa,* however, gives a more detailed description of this dance form, adding new elements and ornamentations to the basic motif. It also speaks of an operatic form called the *cālakya* and a circular dance called the hallīśaka. Several references to such circular dance can also be found in many other Sanskrit texts.

Although the description of the *rāsa* and the early life of Kṛṣṇa is brief and even cursory in *Harivaṁśa* the later Purāṇas devote considerable attention to it. Variations are frequent and a reading of these Purāṇas convinces us of the pervasive sway of the theme. Undoubtedly, this dance form must have enjoyed considerable popularity before the Purāṇas could speak of the rāsa as an metaphor and symbol embodying multiple meanings.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Brahma Purāṇa* devote many chapters to the life of Kṛṣṇa from birth to death: the sections relating to *rāsa* and *līlās* are naturally given importance. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes an elaborate rāsa dance, performed in a circular manner, in moonlight and in autumn. However, unlike the sequence as described in the *Harivaṁśa,* here the gopīs imitate the movements of Kṛṣṇa and say that, "I am Kṛṣṇa, see the elegance of my movements and listen to my song." The dance continues to the music of the clashing bracelets and songs that celebrate in suitable strains, the charms of the autumnal season. The *Agni, Vāyu, Liṅga, Kūrma* and *Padma Purāṇa* all refer to Kṛṣṇa's life, but the most elaborate description of the rāsa is contained in the *Śrimad Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* In nearly fifteen chapters of the latter's tenth *Skanda* are described the various sports of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs, including his playing the flute, the gopī-Kṛṣṇa dialogue, the disappearance of Kṛṣṇa and the imitation of the gopīs as Kṛṣṇa, the reappearance of Kṛṣṇa on the Yamuna, the holding of the Mahārāsa, and finally, the water sports. These sports and their various phases appear to have provided the main inspiration for the many creations on the rāsa by the poets of the Aṣṭachāpa school of Mathura in the 16th century.

The latest Purāṇic work to describe the rāsa is perhaps the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa.* A significant change is noticed in the depiction of the theme. Rādhā, who, except for a casual mention in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata,* is largely absent in all other Purāṇas, becomes here a central figure of the Rāsa. The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa,* obviously, took the idea

from several sources, Purāṇic and others, particularly the *Gangā-Saṁhitā* and Hala's *Gāthāsaptaśatī,* and possibly also Jayadeva's *Gīta-Govinda* which may well have preceded these particular sections of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa,* though scholars are far from unanimous about the approximate date of these sections. Also, both *Gīta-Govinda* and *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* change the season of the rāsa from autumn to spring and introduce Rādhā, a feature absent in the earlier Purāṇas. In any case, whether or not Jayadeva was the first major poet to create the character of Rādhā as a special gopī, the creation led to a shift in the nature of the rāsa: to the gopīṣ and Kṛṣṇa the dance now added a third and important element — Rādhā. The presence of Rādhā naturally introduced a dramatic quality which was of great significance both mystically and artistically. The *Gānga Saṁhitā,* the *Brahmavaivarta* and the *Gīta-Govinda* appear to be the main sources of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme as distinct from the Kṛṣṇa and the Gopī theme.

It must also be pointed out that although all these Purāṇas dwell upon the life of Kṛṣṇa, they do not mention many of the līlās — such as, Mākhana Cori, Panaghat, Dāṇalīlā, etc. which form part of the conventional repertoire of the Vraja rāsa today. The *Kāliadamana, Govardhanalila, Cīraharaṇa,* etc. are mentioned in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* but not in the *Agni, Padma, Vishnu* and *Brahma Purāṇs.*

The Sanskrit *Kāvya* literature of the early and late medieval period also refers, directly or indirectly, to the rāsa or an analogous dance and dance-drama form, the most important amongst these being the *Ratnāvalī* of Śrī Harṣa which mentions the *carcarī*, and the *Veṇī Saṁhāra* of Bhatta Nārāyaṇa which speaks of a rāsa.

It would thus appear that between the period of *Harivaṁśa* (latest date suggested, 3rd century) and *Śrīmad Bhāgavata (about* 10th century) on the one hand, and the Sanskrit *kāvyas* and *nāṭkas* from the 7th to the 12th centuries on the other, the Kṛṣṇa theme, and the rāsa in particular, was known to many parts of India and that it constituted a key motif of mythological, poetic and dramatic writing.

Alongside, we must take cognizance of the academic discussion on this form in the texts and manuals relating to dance, drama, music and the rest. Although some scholars have tried to establish a connection between the different types of *lāsya* described in the *Nāṭyaśātra* with the rāsa, neither Bharata nor Nandikesvara considered the latter as a distinct category. *Agni Purāṇa* alone mentions the rāsaka. However, from the 10th century onwards, more particularly since the 12th century, there begins to appear a discussion on the rāsa and rāsaka in most texts. Hemacandra's *Kāvyānuśīlana* and Śaradatānaya's *Bhāvaprakāśa* of the 14th century devote considerable attention to it. The *Saṅgītaratnākara* alludes to it obliquely. From all these texts, it is amply clear that the rāsa or rāsaka as a distinct category of performance assumed importance only in the medieval period, with its graphic descriptions in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* and the later Purāṇas. By that time there was the recognition of a genre which could be distinguished from the different types of dramatic performance (the *uparūpakas*) and pure music or dance *(saṅgīta* or *nṛtta).* Here the genre comprised the group of compositions called the rāsaka, rāsa, hallīśaka and carcari. There was some overlapping between and amongst

subforms, but the distinguishing feature was certainly the existence of a group dance, phased or unphased, to the accompaniment of instrumental or vocal music. From other sources, we gather that the hallīśaka of the *Harivaṁśa* was perhaps the earliest, and it denoted a circular dance of many women around one man. Rāsaka or rāsa in course of time was not only the dance in a circle but also a dramatic piece with a definite script comprising dialogues and the rest.

In addition to the Sanskrit tradition, there was the literature of Prākrita and Apabhraṁśa. Interestingly enough, the first important examples of the *rāsa* or *rāso* as a theatrical composition come from the Jaina sources of the 12th-13th centuries. The *Jambusvāmī carita* of the 11th century mentions an Ambādevī rāsa: other texts refer to an Antaraṅgarāsa. In the 12th century the rāsa forms appear to become very popular in Jaina literature and nearly a thousand or more rāsa texts have now been located. To the 13th century also belongs the important creation of the so-called *Sandeśarāsaka,* which is followed by other important literary works revolving around Jaina themes such as *Bharateśvara Bāhubali, Ghorarāsa, Amburāsa,* etc. However, only two amongst these treat the theme of Kṛṣṇa: one is the *Śrī Neminātha rāsa* where Neminātha and Kṛṣṇa are seen in combat with each other, with the eventual victory of the former (obviously, the rāsa presents in dramatic form the conflict of the Jaina and the Vaiṣṇava faiths); the other is the *Gayasukumāra rāsa* which describes a rāsa dance only at the very end. The tradition of writing rāsakas and rāsa continued till the 15th century before giving rise to another class of composition called the Phāgu.

While the Jaina tradition continued until the 18th century as a parallel stream this was in addition to the prevalence of rāsa primarily as a music and dance composition.

The period we are now generally describing coincides with the one which saw the formation of many languages in Northern, Eastern and Western India. The early phases of Bengali, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Maithili and Punjabi have much in common and this in turn constitutes the common background of the theatre, dance and musical forms which flourished in these parts of the country from the 10th to the 15th centuries.

It is against this linguistic background involving developments in Sanskrit and various Prakrit and Apabhraṁśa languages, like Sauraseni and Vrajaboli in particular, that we must understand the growth of poetry and theatrical forms of the 16th century in Mathura and Vrindavan.

Though the Kṛṣṇa theme was pervasive in literature, the form of rāsa or rāsaka was not restricted to it, just as the form was not restricted to a merely lyrical mode of dance either. While a variety of the circular dance forms continued in Gujarat, as can be surmised from the early Gujarati work *Saptakṣetrīrāsa* (A.D. 1271) which mentions the tāla rāsa and the lakuṭa rāsa (i.e., the first with clapping of hands and the other with sticks), the term rāsa was also used for a class of composition which had a long narrative in rhymed verse and which had heroic or didactic themes as its content. The Jaina works like *Bharateśvara Bāhubalī* by Śailabhadra, written in early Gujarati, were typical of these new developments.

From the 15th century begins yet another phase. The Vaiṣṇava movement spread, and

with it came a renewed interest in the Kṛṣṇa theme thus giving a new fillip to theatrical and dramatic forms which revolved round it. This was also the period which witnessed a fresh popularity in Eastern India for the *Gīta-Govinda.* For a century or so after its composition by Jayadeva, this work does not seem to have attracted much attention, but from the 15th century onwards begin commentaries and imitations based on it in all parts of the country, particularly Bengal, Orissa and Rajasthan. The earliest Bengali narrative poem, *Kṛṣṇavijaya,* based on the Kṛṣṇa legend belongs to the 15th century and was written by Mātādhara Vasu, who borrowed freely from the *Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* but was also influenced by Jayadeva. Caitanya was acquainted with this work and used it for large devotional gatherings. Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa, on the other hand, modelled his *Śrīkṛṣṇa Kīrtana* more closely on the *Gīta-Govinda.* In Orissa Jayadeva's influence was equally great, if not more. Into the original *cautisas* (a song form of early Oriya) was merged the *Gīta-Govinda aṣṭapadi* form which could both be sung and recited. Upendra Bhanja, Dinkar Das and Kavi Surya Baladeva were the chief exponents of the sung form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This supplemented the many imitations of the *Gīta-Govinda* found in Bengal, Orissa and Mithila. In Bihar, there were similar compositions by Vidyapati and Umapati.

While *Gīta-Govinda* and its artistic form had a deep influence on later compositions, Caitanya and his followers were responsible for a socio-religious cultural movement which spread from Assam, Bengal and Orissa to Vrindavan. Caitanya's stay in Puri and his travels, in company with his many disciples, throughout India were chiefly responsible for establishing the Vaiṣṇava Bhāgavata faith. It was again his disciples who started the worship of Rādha Kṛṣṇa which came to stay in Vrindavan.

While Śaṇkaradeva and his cult of the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavism gave rise in Assam to the tradition of Aṅkia-nāṭa and Bhāona (which did not include Rādhā), Vrindavan provided shelter to Vaiṣṇavas from all parts of India, which finally led to the distinct Vrindavan form of Vaiṣṇavism where the worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa was a central motif. The rāsa, as distinct from the *rāsaka* or *phagu* of the Jaina tradition on the one hand and the dramatic structure of Aṇkiā-nāṭa on the other, became the natural form for its artistic manifestation.

The rāsa, rāsaka, and phāgu traditions branched out into several types of theatrical modes such as the saṅg, svānga, khyāla and nautankā, and influenced bhāvai. The traditions of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* alongwith the *Gītā-Govinda* and different types of composition based on the Vrajaboli and later Vraja-bhāṣā emerged in the rāsalīlā of Vrindavan.

This rather simplified story of the main landmarks of Vaisnavism and the resultant artistic forms between the 12th and 16th centuries was necessary to bring home the fact that today's Vrajarāsa, attributed to the Gosvāmīs of Vrindavan, has vital links with the rest of India not only from the religious point of view but also linguistically and artistically. Indeed, even the developments in South India and their interaction with the movements in the North are aspects that are pertinent to this discussion. Vallabhācārya was himself a migrant from the South. Mobility of religious movements has been a

characteristic feature of the Indian cultural phenomenon. Even this rudimentary survey will perhaps convince one that while on the one hand the development of the seemingly unsophisticated popular rāsa of Mathura has links with purāṇic, if not Vedic, literature in Sanskrit, it has equally powerful links with many medieval Indian languages, particularly those from the North, East and West regions. It is also influenced by historical developments of the Vaiṣṇava faith caused by the latter's different exponents, chief amongst those were Vallabhācārya and his followers.

The Aṣṭachāpa poets, known as the eight jewels, were the disciples of Vallabhācārya and his son Viṭhalanātha, both exponents of the Puṣṭi mārga. The poetry of all these saints, be it that of Kumbhanadāsa, Suradāsa, Kṛṣṇadasa, Nandadāsa or any others, resounds with the music of Kṛṣṇa's flute. The dancing Kṛṣṇa is the hero of this poetry as he is of Mirābaī's. Although the Bāla Gopāla is extolled in this poetry, there is valuable evidence relating to the rāsa. The rāsa of Kṛṣṇa which had formed only a small part of the poetry of the period immediately preceding the 16th century, is given prominence and a pride of place here. Rādhā is without doubt a multi-dimensional character now, overlayed with more than one significance. More often than not, she is deified as *Śakti,* the female principle. In artistic terms, we see here the theme of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and gopīs providing scope for the creation of *solo,* duet and small group dances.

While there is some controversy about the beginnings of the Rāsalīlā form of Mathura and Vrindavan, the present tradition can perhaps be traced back to a period coinciding with the poets of Aṣṭachāipa school and the Gosvāmīs of Vrindavan. Some scholars have attributed its origins to one Nārayaṇa Bhaṭṭa, others to a certain Svāmī by the name of Ghamaṇḍi who is said to have lived in the 16th century. In any case, such evidence that is available in the *Granth Sāhib* and some other literature of that time, as also the allusion to Kīrtaniyās by Abul-Fazl and the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa saṅgīta in the *Nārada Pañcarātra* of the 16th century, in addition to evidence provided by inscriptions and other records, all tend to conclusively prove that the convention of performing the Rāsalīlā in the precincts of the temple was well established by the time of Akbar.

It is also quite possible that though the Rāsalīlā as described in the *Śrimad Bhāgavata* of the 10th century became a living theatrical tradition fairly early, it did not seem to receive much political and social patronage in North India on account of the unsettled socio-political conditions prevailing then in this region. The popularity of the new socio-cultural movement of the Vaiṣṇavas gave it a fresh impetus enabling it to establish itself firmly in Vrindavan. Mathura and Vrindavan became important centres of the movement in North India as much as Puri and Nabadweep were in the East.

Enough evidence of the continuity and prevalence of the tradition is available in the innumerable miniature paintings of the medieval period on the Kṛṣṇa theme, particularly the rāsa as described in the *Bhāgavata.* It is significant that in spite of the prolific depiction of dance in Indian sculpture generally, it is not until the 13th and 14th centuries that we come across scenes of collective dance with pairs either holding sticks or clapping. The most outstanding examples of the *lakuṭa* or dāṇḍiyā rāsa come from the Hazara Rama temple of the Vijayanagar period. One male dancer surrounded by many

women is also unknown to Indian sculpture. In painting the two well-known examples come from the Bagh and Ajanta caves between the 5th and 7th centuries. The scene in Bagh has been identified as the *hallīśaka*, while the Ajanta mural shows a woman surrounded by other women. Thereafter appears a big gap, and the theme emerges again in the miniature paintings. It is also clear from the paintings that they portray Kṛṣṇa's life at Vrindavan in two different ways; his *līlās* and his *rāsa*. This development in the literary and pictorial arts may well reflect a theatrical reality of the period which the poets and painters attempted to portray. The theatrical experience and its possibilities of innovations may also explain the occasional enlargement of a Purāṇic content by adding new episodes or interpretations which were no doubt contributed by the local oral traditions. Also, it must be remembered that these developments were contemporaneous with the Jaina traditions of *rāsaka* and *rāso* where the themes were didactic and heroic and the form narrative and dramatic, rather than operatic and kinetic.

It can thus be seen that many diverse elements contributed to the making of the present day Rāsalīlā, which can be traced back to the 16th century. Jayadeva without doubt was responsible for giving a different mould to the theme through both the introduction of Rādhā and the association of *rāgas* and *tālas* to the poetic verse. Other factors, which were socio-cultural and religious rather than artistic, also contributed to the growth of the form.

Whether it was Haridāsaji Māhāraj or Śri Hit Harivaṁśa Vyāsa or the poets of the Aśṭachāpa school, all drew upon sources both from outside Vrindavan and local oral traditions. We had observed the similar phenomenon in the context of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā where the Sanskrit and regional language traditions coexisted and contributed simultaneously. Rāsalīlā presents another facet of the same cultural process. It was the Rāsalīlā of Mathura and Vrindavan which travelled to Manipur in the 18th century and gave rise to a distinctive form in that region, although at the same time having affinities with the Vaiṣṇava traditions of neighbouring regions like Bengal. Here the aspect of the *līlā* was minimised and the different forms of rāsa were developed in such a stylized manner that the form hardly contained any traces which could even be remotely called folk or *Deśī*. However paradoxical it may seem, here is an example of how mobility and diffusion can be responsible for creating a distinctive regional form. The uniqueness of each local form of an otherwise pervasive cultural movement makes the picutre of the theatre arts of India fascinating, even if somewhat complex and puzzling at first sight.

But all this is still spatially outside Vrindavan and temporarally, the past. What about the actors, the social organisation of the performance and finally the artistic form of the Rāsalīlā as we see it today?

The contemporary Rāsalīlā of Vrindavan is the special preserve of the Smāmīs and the Gosāins who trace their family history to many generations and in most cases to the 16th century. The Mathura *Gazeteers,* memoirs and papers of British and other foreign visitors of the 19th century speak both of the families of patrons and performers as also of the spectacle. Contemporary Rasadharis (or Svamis as they are called) such as the late

Ladlisarana and Śri Megh Syāma Svāmī could reel off genealogies: today Śrī Rāma Svarūp Svāmī, son of Sri Megh Syan, is the leader of a popular troupe and has travelled widely outside Mathura and Vridavan. The svāmī or the Rāsadhārī is somewhat analogous to the Vyasa of the Rāmalīlā but is more. The Mathura Svāmī is indeed the head of an organization like the Kuṭiyaṭṭam Cākyār and educates and supports his pupils. Young boys from the age of eight are enrolled, some may be the sons and relatives of the Svāmī. In this respect the social organization is akin to the *bāuls* of Bengal who are also teachers to their children and a particular group of trainees. Here they are mainly, but not exclusively, Brahmins. The roles of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs are performed by boys under the age of fourteen. At puberty either their career comes to an end or they take other roles such as that of Sudāmā Udhava, etc. which can be played by adults. In the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi also only young boys before puberty take the role of Rāma, Sīta and Lakṣmaṇa: in the Manipur rāsa a similar convention is followed where only young girls before puberty perform all roles including that of Kṛṣṇa. In Nepal a similar convention is followed in rituals and plays connected with *Śakti*.

The training is rounded and comprises the study of Purāṇas and other literature, singing and dancing: discipline is strict like that of an *aśrama* or a residential school where pupils are allowed to visit parents only for a specific period and at definite intervals. The social organisation of the artists of Yakṣagana and Bhāgavatamelā is similar, although in South India the temple organizations or the *Devasthānams* maintain the groups totally. In Vrindavan, despite the fact that the Svāmīs are attached to particular temples, the upkeep of the trainees and the raising of financial resources seem largely to be their responsibility. The venue of the Rāsalīlā is not restricted to the temple although in many cases it continues to be the temple courtyard. Sometimes it is now a patron's residence, or a public stage or an auditorium. In all cases the Rāsalīlā demands a special stage. It is normally a circular platform of stone or concrete, three feet high. The symbolic significance of the circular stage is clear, for it represents the *rāsamaṇḍala* of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. On one end of the stage is a dais or platform called the raṅgamañca or a raised throne called the *siṁhāsana*. The two levels of the stage are essential and clearly recall the division of the Sanskrit stage into the *raṅgapiṭha* and the *raṅgaśīrṣa*. All scenes where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa appear in their deified form and to which they return at the end are performed on the raised back stage; other scenes suggesting passage of time or change of locale are performed on the lower stage. The Kuṭiyaṭṭam stage has also similar divisions though they are used for slightly different purposes. The division of the acting area into multiple levels follows the conventions of *Kakṣsa-Vibhāga* (zonal divisions) as described in the *Nāṭaśastra*. Ritual is held behind a curtain on the platform or the *siṁhāsana* as in the case of some other dramatic forms. We must also recall that in all dramatic forms, the preceding ritual, whether long or short, is essential and integral to the performance and cannot be dispensed with.

Thus in the case of Vrajarāsa the duration of the make-up and the wearing of costumes is considered to be the period of the transformation of the child-actor into the incarnation, i.e., the *svarūpa*. Once thus decorated, he is no longer himself but a concrete

symbol of Godhood and thus all honours and deference due to an icon are given to the human *svarūpa.* He is carried on the shoulders of others, is worshipped by the svāmi and the devotees alike, and for all purposes has acquired divine status and attributes.

The performance proper is divided as has been mentioned before into two clear-cut portions, one the *rasa* and the other presentation of the *lilas.* Some scholars have considered it necessary to divide it into three divisions, namely, the *nṛtya* rāsa, the Saṅgitaka and the līlā.

The spectacle begins with the "jhānki" or tableaux like presentation behind a curtain held by two assistants. When the curtain is raised, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are seen sitting on the raised platform or the *siṁhāsana.* An invocatory verse is sung, and this section is called the *mangalācarana.* The svāmī, who is the director of the performance, touches the feet of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and of the Gopīs as the invocatory *mangalācarana* is being sung. The verses are drawn from many literary sources, both Sanskrit and Vrajabhasa, and they range from an invocation to Guru as Guru Brahmā, Guru Viśṇu and Guru Maheśvara to the *padas* of Suradāsa or the compositions of Svāmis themselves. There are two sections of the *mangalācarana,* one a *śloka* in Sanskrit and the other a "doha" in Vrajabhāṣa. The recitation is followed by the singing of the verses by the musicians and their accompanists, the instrumentalists. Additional songs or rhymed couplets are added to suit particular occasions. The style of singing of this portion is largely in the "dhruvapada" style. The entry of the gopīs with plates containing different articles for the *āratī* coincides with the end of the first phase. The *āratī* (with lamps, incense, flower petals) is performed by the gopīs with great solemnity. The musicians sing the *āratī* song and are joined by the child-actors performing the role of the gopīs. The first two sections comprise the *stuti* part of the Rāsa: they help build an atmosphere of devotion and seriousness. The *āratī* verses are also drawn from several literary sources and are often the creations of the Svāmīṣ themselves. Naturally, the *āratī* is performed before the divine pair, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Then follows the *Gopīprārthanā* or the entreaty of the Gopīs to Kṛṣṇa to begin the *nṛtya-rāsa.* In simple prose, Kṛṣṇa is asked to enter the *rāsamaṇḍala* (i.e. the acting area on the lower stage). Kṛṣṇa then turns to Rādhā and requests her to join the rāsa. This is done both through prose dialogue and sung verses. Rādhā agrees, responding affectionately through another verse which extols Kṛṣṇa as *Rāsaśiromaṇi* or *Rasikaśīromaṇi,* and describes him as the musician-dancer supreme. Most verses are drawn from the Aṣṭachāpa school and from the compositions of the Gosains, including Hit Harivaṁśa, Haridāsa and others. Rādhā's response over, the couple gradually descend to the *rāsamaṇḍala* as preparation for commencing the *rāsa.* The most exciting section, the *rāsa* dance, then commences. This is rigorously structured into different phases comprising many complex choreographical patterns. While the first phases of the rāsa have an element of mime and *abhinaya*-they are mostly speech and singing-the rāsa section proper is pure dance or *nṛtta.* The vocal accompaniment is also all mnemonics or "bols," which are often common to contemporary Kathak and Vrajarāsa. In the initial stage, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa face each other and the gopīs stand between them. In the phases which follow, circles are formed. The formations are of

many varieties, so also are the methods of interlocking hands and arms. Often the vocal accompaniment is not only the mnemonics of the drum (*pakhāvaj*), but where many technical terms are strung together in rhymed verses. There is frequent mention of the nature of foot-work used (*pāda patakani*), or of the nature of waist movements *(kaṭi)* or of the nature of facial gestures (*hāvabhāva*) or of the use of the hands *(hastaka)*; also mentioned are the nature of circles *(maṇḍalas)* and choreographical patterns through interlocking (*phandā*), equivalent possibly of *pinḍi) bandhas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

The technique of the dance is built on an elaborate and developed system of *tāla* and the utilization of all the tempos, slow, medium and fast. The circle formations are reminiscent of the descriptions in the purāṇas of the rāsa and the interlocking patterns of hands and arms. The choreographic designs of the open and the closed circle recall the description of a class of movement patterns described by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as the *pinḍis*. The *pinḍibandhas* are mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the context of the preliminaries of the play and are said to be of four or five types. Chief amongst these are the *Śṛṇkhalā* (chain formation) or open circle, the *Gulma* (cluster formation) or the closed circle, and the radii-like formation of the petals of a lotus. In the Vrajarasa we can find all these, even if there may or may not be a direct relationship between the Vrajarasa dance technique and the movement patterns described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra.* Many other tribal and folk dances of India illustrate these ancient descriptions.

At one point, in keeping with the descriptions of the rāsa in the *Viṣṇuu Purāṇa,* the gopīs imitate Kṛṣṇa, and this is followed by an exacting and exciting dance sequence of Kṛṣṇa where a solo number is performed. A characteristic feature of this solo is the dance on the knees, similar to a movement in the Yakṣagāna called maṇḍi and identical with a typical Kṛṣṇa dance in Manipur Rāsa. Other movements of the Vrajarāsa are reminiscent of the description of particular types of *bhramaris* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the dance performed by Vikrama in Kālidasa's play *Vikramorvaśīyam* where he goes searching for Urvasī.

Foot work is important in the *rāsa* and is in deep contrast to the simple *gatis* and walking steps of the earlier portions, which are often rather simplistically and naturalistically presented. Mnemonics like *thai, thun, thun, bhika, gadagina,* etc. are called *parimūla* and are often found in Kathak. Others are distinctive to rāsa alone and have today become obsolete in Kathak. There is also a definite stylization of standing positions and walking movements which have some affinities with Kathak, but are quite distinctive. The pirouettes or the "cakkaras" however are common to both genres. The relationship of the rāsa and the līlā portions of Vrajarāsa with the *nṛtta* and *gata bhāva* or *artha bhāva* portions of Kathak is another dimension of the mutual interdependence of forms on different levels within a region. A detailed technical study of the diverse elements would provide many valuable insights into the nature of these relationships. The *tukrā* or *torā* pattern is common to both.

The rāsa of Vraja can also incorporate the *dāṇḍiyā rāsa* or the *lakuṭa rāsa* described in the Gujarati texts and known to other parts of India, particularly Saurashtra. It can also

take the form of a rāsa with lights or candles and today sometimes a Bhavāi-like acrobat can begin showing his skills of counterpoising glasses, pots and the like.

As the tempo increases, the participation of the audience is heightened, and in a mood of intense ecstasy, the nṛtya-rāsa concludes after there have been many duets and group dances, and then, almost in a flash, the vigorous movements, the complexity of the rhythms, the vivacity of the songs, all give place to a calm stillness of iconic form, with the return of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa to the raised dais and taking their seats on the *siṁhāsana* as if framed in a picture. The illusion of gods come to earth for sport and play and their ultimate deification is complete. The Svāmī returns to offer his obeisance to the group. All spectators join in to offer flowers, money or whatever else they may like to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and there is a concluding verse.

Finally, there is a discourse *(pravacana)* by Kṛṣṇa or Sri Thākurji as he is called in the rāsa: In this he can speak, as Kṛṣṇa and the special attributes of this *avatāra* or any other subject and often the *Gīta* or other texts are brought to aid. The curtain is lifted and held again and the god-incarnates, the *svarūpas,* disappear.

It will be clear that throughout the performance the objective is never to forget the symbolism or the dual level on which the theatrical spectacle is moving. The rāsa is performed by the child actors only as suggestive of happenings elsewhere and at no point is there an attempt at a literal interpretation or realistic presentation of the theme. The nature of stylization and the techniques used are very different from those we find in epic dramatic forms which revolve around the *Mahābhārata.* In the līlās, be it a Rāmalīlā or a Kṛṣṇa, it is truly sport-play which has a mystical significance, a lyrical form, and a lightness of touch resembling a dream, all performed in *nāṭya* and not lokadharmi.

The end of the *rāsa* is the beginning of the *līlās*. More than the *rāsa*, the līlās draw upon the poetry of the Aṣṭachaāpa school. An anthology compiled by one Indra Brahmacārī called the *Sri Kṛṣṇalīlā rahasya* consists of the works not only of the poets of the 16th to 18th centuries but also contemporary rāsadhārīs. The works of poets like Nandadāsa, Suradāsa and Kumbhanadāsa are popular; so also are those written by Svāmi Haridāsa and Śri Hit Harivaṁśa. Over a hundred and fifty *līlās* constitute the repertoire of the *rāsadhārīs* or the different *rāsamaṇḍaīs*. The Svāmī choses different līlās for different occasions. The themes of some are found in the Purāṇas, others being later innovations. Popular amongst these is the mākhana corī and the Uddhavalīlā, which provide immense scope for dialogues in prose and verse, singing and mime. The compositions of one Cācā Vrindavanadāsa constitute a class by themselves and are often used by many *rāsadhan maṇḍalīs* today.

There is a clear-cut division of the dramatic structure of the līlās. The dialogues are distributed amongst the characters, and the dramatic action and interlinking narrative passages sung or recited by the Svāmī. This division provides the pace and tempo of the story presented with suitable pauses, slurring over some portions and highlighting others. Also, as in other dramatic forms, there is a judicious admixture of prose and verse, of the recited as well as the sung word. In the Southern forms we had noticed the use of the *vacana* prose form and the *campu* verse form. Here also there are sometimes straight

prose passages and sometimes recited or sung verses. Often a couplet sung by a character is repeated by the chorus: at other times, the dialogue is purely in verse. And yet other times, while a character presents almost realistic or certainty naturalistic mime as in the *makhāna corī* (where objects like real butter, etc. are used), descriptions are provided by the chorus.

While Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Yaśodā are acted by the child actors, the Svāmī often takes the role of Uddhava, the messenger of Kṛṣṇa, or Sudāmā. From the role of a narrator and director he assumes the role of a character in the drama with the fullest freedom to improvise, create or innovate. He then remains not the editor of older texts, who selects his material to suit the occasion, but becomes a poet, creator, actor and more often than not a preacher. The audience listens to him in spell bound silence. The ecstatic devotion of the rāsa is replaced by a charged fervour of another order and day after day, night after night, thousands of spectators throng to see and hear.

The music of the rāsa and the līlā is set to *rāgas* and *tālas,* as has been pointed out earlier. The poets of the Aṣṭachāpa school indicate the *rāga* and *tāla* of their verses in most cases, following a convention begun by Jayadeva. Some *rāgas* are common to Vrajarāsa and Hindustani classical music. Other melodies are drawn from local tunes and folk forms. The instruments comprise the drum *(mṛdaṅga* or the pakhāvaja), cymbals *(mañjira),* the flute (bānsurī), and today, the *sāraṅgi,* the *sitār* and, alas, the harmonium. In medieval poetry there are frequent references to the rhubab, the *vīṇ. ā,* the daph, the khañjari, etc., many of which seem to have gone out of use now

We have already drawn attention to the special costuming and make-up of the Rāsalīlā which aims at presenting characters as picutres, in an iconic form. Kṛṣṇa wears a *"dhotī"* or a pyjama below, but above it is a long skirt with multiple frills possibly called the katakacani. The multiple frills are in different colours with yellow, blue and purple dominating. The skirt is held at the waist by a *patakā* or *sash*. The upper garment is a full sleeved blouse. In the latter phases of Rāsalīlā he exchanges the skirt with a *dhotī* or a *pitāmbara* (a yellow *dhotī).* Garlands, beads and strings of pearls are worn on top of the blouse and the skirt. While the costume is distinctive to the Vrajarāsa, the headdress is unique to it. Over a small turban or "pag" are worn several ornaments. There is a tuft of peacock feathers which is thrust into the turban almost at the centre: and on one side a little tilted, conical, gilded ornament is tied to the turban. In the centre and in front of the peacock feathers is a gilded crest which is often spade-shaped. From either side over the ears are worn locks of false hair or plumes which hang like tassels at shoulder or chest level. All this is secured by a gilded tiara or a *moramukuṭa* which covers part of the forehead, the crest and the cone which are immediately behind the tiara. The crest is slanted a little to the left by the followers of the Vallabha-*sampradāya* and to the right by the followers of the Gaḍiya and Nimbārka *Sampradāya*. From the turban at the back hangs a piece of black cloth which goes down to the hips or the knees. Kṛṣṇa's costume of Kathākali also has a similar piece of costuming. Although people believe that this adornment called the "coti" has something to do with the story of Kṛṣṇa's vanquishing Kāliya, it is perhaps a picturesque device to conceal all the strings

and ribbons which are needed to secure the different parts of the intricate headgear. Rādhā and the gopīs are more simply dressed in *sārīs* or skirts and wear *mukuṭas* (tiaras) and the usual garlands and strings of beads.

The costume of Kṛṣṇa represents a fairly long tradition judging from the fact that Rajasthani paintings from the 16th century onwards often show him wearing multiple skirts over a *dhotī,* or a skirt with multiple bands and frills. The paintings of Śrīnātha and the Nāthadvārā Pechwai also show Kṛṣṇa wearing this type of skirt, the crest, the hanging tassels and the *moramukuṭa*. The costume appears to have been popular in Rajasthan and Gujarat for nearly three to four hundred years. A few miniature paintings of the Mṛgāvati series in Uttar Pradesh show this particular costume. Evidence of such skirts is also found in the context of some dance scenes in Akbar's court, but they are of a slightly different kind.

Whatever may be the sources of the present rasa costuming, it appears that the Rāsadhārīs were following a tradition of costuming which was well established and popular both in the context of the Kṛṣṇa theme and outside it.

The Manipuri rāsalīlā evolved its own costuming which was equally other-worldly and sought to create a distance between the dress of the mortals and that of the divine, but was quite different from the one in Vrajarāsa.

All in all, the Vraja Rāsalīlā presents a fascinating and characteristic picture of the Indian artistic traditions where one highly localised form has many connections with the past and with other regions of India. Its content can be traced back to classical Sanskrit literature although the composition lean heavily on 16th Century literature. The dramatic and poetic form has many points of contact with developments in regional literatures written in Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati and Rajasthani languages. In artistic technique it has many interesting parallels in miniature paintings, and in dance technique it is closest to the sophisticated urbane Kathak.

Once again, we are thus face to face with a theatrical form which is only seemingly simple, unsophisticated and rural. The present analysis of its different elements has, it is hoped, identified that the folk or *desī* form contains within it many elements of the *mārgī* or sophisticated traditions. Its outer physical environment — that is, its social organization — is undoubtely rural and vaguely folk, but its inner structure is rigorous, well conceived, with a body of clearly identifiable techniques of acting, dance and music.

XI

YĀTRĀ

Bengal and Orissa, as we have already had occasions to emphasize, are important constituents of the multiple streams of Indian culture. Orissa has been the home of many early cultures. Monuments of Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri are fine examples of these developments. It is also known that Jaina traditions were rich and sustained and that Buddhism had a long flourishing history. The medieval monuments of Bhuvanesvara, Puri, Konarka speak of the rich and varied architectural and sculptural traditions. These were patronised by kings and princes but fostered as much by the multi-layered tribal and village culture. The mosaic of tribes and ethnic groups and their part in the building up of regional culture is today recognised. The Sāorās and the Pāikas have sustained traditions which would have otherwise been lost. Similarly, Bengal has been the pioneer of many movements in ancient, medieval and modern India. It also presents the same picture of a multi-layered society where many ethnic groups have played an important role. The medieval dynasties of the Pālas and Senās have left behind invaluable pieces of Indian sculpture. The influence of Bengal on the cultures of adjacent areas, particularly Bihar, Orissa and Nepal, is well known: its tribal culture has fostered forms like the Purulia Chau which has strong affinities with analogous forms in Bihar and Orissa. The tribal societies of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa have also much in common.

All this and more must be taken into account while looking at a seemingly simple but vital and popular form like the Yātrā (pronounced as Jātrā). Since the contours of this spatial and temporal landscape are known and adequately delineated, we have with purpose not dwelt upon them in any detail here. Needless also to draw attention to the fact that all along, these regions have been the home of many great writers of the Sanskrit tradition and that between the 10th and l6th centuries there was as much activity in the Sanskrit language as was the preoccupation with the emerging new languages which ultimately came to be recognised as Maithili, Bengali and Oriya.

In the context of Rāsalīla, Aṇkia-nāṭa or the Bhāona we have drawn attention to the common linguistic and cultural heritage of Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, U.P. and Assam. We have seen how Assamese, Avadhi, Bengali, Gujarati, Maithili, Oriya and Rajasthani, all evolved out of Apabhralilsa and Laukika. We also tried to identify the salient features of the pan-Indian Vaiṣṇava movement of the medieval India which was responsible in a large measure, although not exclusively, for mobility of ideas and artistic expressions.

This common ancestry provides a continuous backdrop for the development of literary and theatrical genres in several parts of India, between the 14th and 18th centuries. These medieval developments continue to have links with the Sanskrit tradition in Northern and Eastern India, as well as in South India.

While there is a pervasive sway of similar movements in the western parts of Northern and Eastern India, Bengal, Orissa and Bihar form a special macro-group where many parallel developments were contemporaneous. Indeed, in the period which has been roughly identified as the period of middle Bengali (1350-1800) and the post-Gaṇga or post-Sāralā period of Oriya literature, there was much interaction and mutual influence. The religio-social movements, the literary genres and artistic expressions were similar despite the respective distinctiveness of each region and artistic form.

The Yātrā of Orissa and Bengal are outstanding examples of this affinity and distinctiveness. While the form is considered purely folk and rural in the context of Orissa, today in Bengal it has regained the status of a highly professional semi-urban theatre which has made serious inroads into recent developments in modern theatre.

The origins of Oriya or Bengali Yātrā are somewhat hazy and the discussion has been full of controversies and widely divergent views.

It is neither necessary nor productive for us to trace the history of these controversies. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to point out that despite opposing views all historians and literary critics have drawn attention to the mention of the Yātrā in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and have also attributed the beginnings of dramatic presentation in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to Jayadeva's *Gīta-Govinda*. They have also agreed that during the 15th and 16th centuries there emerged a distinct poetic language called Brajabauli which was exclusively cultivated by the Vaiṣṇava lyric poets. We have seen how Śaṅkaradeva used the language and what links it had with Mathura and Vrindavan. In Bengal, Orissa and Bihar also there were many Vaiṣṇava poets and writers who used the language. Amongst these the names of Umāpati and Vidyāpati of Mithila are well known.

Although most scholars have not drawn attention to this fact, it is important to remember that all these developments in regional languages and artistic styles co-existed with the continued activity in the Sanskrit language. We had noticed a similar phenomenon in the context of Kerala, Andhra and Karnataka. Thus, while the activity in Sanskrit provided one line of growth, the regional languages were a second and parallel line which only overlayered and did not obliterate the earlier trends.

At first glance, a form normally called a procession theatre may seem to have nothing to do with these developments. But in fact, its growth is affected by these multidimensional developments in literature and other arts. The many conventions of the Yātrā flow directly or indirectly from conventions of the Sanskrit theatre. Indeed, its basic structure is a carryover of the Sanskrit tradition although its later growth has been distinctly regional. In Orissa, Vidyādhara wrote his *Ekāvalī* and Govardhana Ācārya his *Ārya Sapta Śatī* in Sanskrit: critics and theoreticians continued to flourish until we come to the towering personalities of Viśvanātha, the writer of the *Sāhitya Darpana,* and Sāmanta Candra Śekhara, the author of the *Siddhānta Darpana.* The enactment of

Sanskrit plays was known both to Bengal and Orissa, and we have references to the staging of *Uttara Rāmacarita* and *Mālatī Mādhava* in Bengal and Orissa. *Prabodhacandrodaya* which influenced Śaṅkaradeva may possibly have been written in Orissa, and *Anaragharāghava* of Murāri Miśra was the first cycle play on the Rāma theme. There was similar activity in Bengal. Naturally the Yātrā must have drawn upon (like its counterparts in other parts of India) both the Sanskrit tradition and regional artistic forms. This fact is evident from an analysis of its literary material and its artistic form and technique.

In Bengal there was a form of singing called the "caryā" which was popular between the 9th and 12th centuries. The commentaries on the *Amarakoṣa* mention its existence and some fragments from these are quoted in copper-plate grants. The language of these songs are close to Avaṭṭha and they are considered to be a creation of sections of people who were followers of Mahāyāna Buddhism. There are references to a *Buddha nāṭaka* and to a few musical instruments. While no definite deductions can be made from this evidence it is clear that this was a kind of musical drama which was possibly prevalent between the 9th and 12th centuries. During the same period the *Caryā padas* were also popular in Orissa. From the earliest times Orissa was a great centre of Buddhism: Oriya literature and architecture, sculpture and painting clearly reveal this influence not only in ancient India but also medieval India.

While the *Caryā padas* and the dramas based on Buddhist themes may well have provided fertile ground for later developments, the real foundations of poetic, musical and dramatic activity were provided by the *Gīta-Govinda* in all the three states of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. Its unique and overpowering effect was not restricted to these regions but extended to Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and much later, Kerala. Unlike the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* and other Purāṇas; it introduced a dramatic element in a narrative. Rādhā, Sakhī and Kṛṣṇa form characters of a drama despite the lyrical form with musical interludes and purely descriptive passages. We have already seen its significance, although oblique, role in the shaping of the Rāsalīlā form and the influence of the Prabandha form on the poetic compositions of all southern Indian languages. The impact of *Gīta-Govinda,* both from the point of view of content as well as the introduction of a new style of poetic composition where music and dance were integral, has also to be seen against the background of a few styles of singing and recitation which were popular both in Orissa and Bengal. Amongst these the most significant were the Cautisa compositions of Orissa and the songs of the Siddhācāryas in Bengal. After the *Gīta-Govinda* the new poetic compositions in Bengali, Oriya and Maithili all followed the Prabandha type of literary composition and many imitations and translations of the *Gīta-Govinda* appeared in these languages. In Orissa alone nearly half a dozen translations appeared: amongst these the versions of Dharaṇīdhara and Vrindāvanadāsa were most popular. The latter also provided the musical melody *(rāga)* and the metrical cycle *(tāla)* after the manner of Jayadeva.

Umāpati (1324) and Vidyāpati (1403) in Mithila followed the pattern of Jayadeva's *Gīta-Govinda* closely. Umāpati's *Pārijātaharaṇa* was based on a Paurāṇic theme which

was popular throughout India during the medieval period. He presented it in a dramatic structure of lyrics set to music, capable of theatrical presentation. Vidyāpati wrote the *Gorakṣavijaya* which was also a musical play, on the same pattern.

In Bengal appeared the works of Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa which closely followed the musical traditions of *Gīta-Govinda. Sri Kṛṣṇa Kirtana* draws freely upon the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* for its content but the story is presented through musical dialogues of three characters, namely Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and an old lady, Baḍāi. This trio pattern in a dramatic composition and almost became standard in medieval writing and theatrical presentation.

It is however interesting to note that although the Prabandha form was equally popular in many parts of India, the *rāsa* or *rāsaka*, which we have spoken of in the context of the Rāsalīlā, was rather insignificant in Bengal and Orissa. Only a solitary poem of Kṛttivāsa written in Brajabauli was called *rāso* or *rāsa*.

Along side was the development of prose forms; these were the counterparts of the Vacana forms of South India and were called the Vacanikā. They were the vehicle of prose narratives based as much on myth and legend as on history and chronicles. Sāraḷā Dāsa's contribution to Oriya literature and to dramatic activity in this respect was second only to the influence of Jayadeva. He translated the *Mahābhārata* in Oriya which was the common language of the people. He gave many episodes of the *Mahābhārata* a twist and turn which imbued it with contemporary relevance and a didactic purpose. He was followed by others. In Bengal, Paramesvaradasa wrote the *Mahābhārata* at a slightly later date.

Literary activity also exhibited a new interest in the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* which is easily borne out by the many versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which appeared in Bengal and Orissa about this time. In Orissa, Balarāmadāsa wrote his Oriya *Rāmāyaṇa* where Rāma was more of a human than the ideal God hero of Tulasidāsa. A local, almost domestic, colouring was given to the characters and many new episodes were introduced. Kṛttivāsa wrote the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* a little later, about the middle of the 16th century. He too like Balarāmadāsa changed both the story and the language and used a local dialect which could be easily understood by the people. Both these provided excellent literary material for the performance of the yātrā type of theatrical spectacle.

The renewed interest in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* was coeval with the interest in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata.* A junior contemporary of Balarāmadāsa was Jagannāthādāsa who wrote the Oriya *Bhāgavata.* He recited the episodes of Kṛṣṇa to large masses in Orissa and around his life have grown many legends and folk tales which are prevalent even today.

And into this scene of the impact of the *Gīta-Govinda*, writings of Caṇḍīdāsa, Umāpati, Vidyāpati the translations and local versions of *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* appeared the towering personality of Caitanya. His influence was extensive and pervasive. Bengal and Orissa were equally his home. Born in one, he lived the most significant years of his life in the other.

Caitanya and his followers were responsible for bringing about a national integration

in many parts of India at the cultural level at a time when all these regions had known much political and economic disturbance. Their contribution to a reawakening is too well known and needs no recounting, even though historians have been of the view that it needs major revaluation. We are concerned here with their role as creators, directors of drama and those who self-consciously used the vehicle of drama for religio-social purpose. Perhaps Caitanya realised its unifying democratising role and while others before him had made attempts and had also been successful in part, he give all these beginnings a pace and momentum which was to sweep not only Eastern India but also some part of North India. To him and his followers we owe the first definite presentation of theatrical spectacle where Caitanya himself played the role of Rukmini. This then was perhaps the beginning of the Kṛṣṇa Yātrā, the predecessor of the contemporary Jātrā of Bengal and Orissa. As has been pointed out before, dance and dance-drama forms were known both to Bengal and Orissa. The Naṭā gīti was a form prevalent in Bengal and Orissa. There were also many forms of ballad singing and dancing. Important amongst these was the precursor of the form today called Sāhi Yātrā where two or more parties come in a procession in a competitive if not a combative spirit. Orissa also had the tradition of the Bhāgavtaghara, a counterpart of the Nāmaghara of Assam, apart from the several Nāṭa-maṇḍapas attached to the temples. But the establishment of a theatre tradition which incorporated all these elements and could be presented before large audience was nevertheless a distinctive contribution of Caitanya and his followers. They took it out of both and presented it in the street. During extensive travels in Orissa, Vrindavan and other places, they met many other Vaiṣṇava saints and poets. Many of them wrote plays and musical dramas on Vaiṣṇava themes. These could all be grouped together under the title of the Kṛsna Yātrā or Jātrā. Sanātana and Rūpa Gosvāmī, the two principal disciples; were the creators of many such plays. Some revolved around only the Kṛṣṇa theme and others around the Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā theme. It is said that the play Lalita-Mādhava by Rūpa Gosvāmi was performed in the Rādhaākānta Maṭtha which was Caitanya's home in Puri. Rāya Rāmānanda wrote the Jagannātha Vallabhanand: this was enacted in the courtyard of the temple of Jagannātha. Later it had many performances in the Maṭha, another important centre of Caitanya's activities. Again as in the case of Rukmini Harana where Caitanya took the part of Rukmiṇī, Rāya Rāmānanda who had renounced his position as a viceroy of Orissa to probably join Caitanya, took the part of the hero. There is a mass of evidence to prove that many plays called Goṣṭhi and Yātrā were performed outside the Jagannatha temple at Puri. Piysalahari is one such important play.

All this no doubt established the tradition of presenting plays as part of a larger religio-social movement. It is not without significance that apart from the many biographies of Caitanya written by his contemporaries and his successors, there is a vast amount of pictorial evidence in miniatures, scrolls (paṭa) and book-covers which show Caitanya singing and dancing with his disciples.

Dramatic activity of the followers was significant. Some plays revolved around the personality of Caitanya, like *Caitanya Candrodaya,* others dwelt on many aspects of the

Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme. Jayadeva had drawn up earlier incipient references to Rādhā and raised her to the status of a special heroine. It was left to the followers of Caitanya to imbue her with many mystical and theological connotations of the Vaiṣṇava cult. Music played a predominant role in all this dramatic writing. The *Jagannatha Vallabha,* described as a *Sangita-nataka* in five acts, is closely patterned on the *Gīta-Govinda.* The *Dana-Keli-Kaumudī* which calls itself a Bhaṇita of the Upariipaka variety is a short one-act play and the *Vidagdha-Madhava* is a more extensive work of a regular naṭaka type in seven acts. The *Lalita-Madhava* is even more complicated; its theme and plot is spun out in ten acts.

In the 16th and 17th centuries appear two streams from the same Vaiṣṇava movement of Caitanya. One was the *Kirtāna* singing and the other, dramatic performances revolving around the theme of Kṛṣṇa or of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Later, Manipur also adopted the two forms and we begin to have a distinct tradition of *Kirtana* singing in each of these regions as also of the presentation of Yātrā. The developments in Assam were a little earlier or concurrent, not subsequent.

A continuous history of this growth can be traced in all parts of Orissa, Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Manipur between the 16th and 18th centuries. The story of this growth is as interesting and fascinating as it is characteristic of the Indian cultural phenomenon involving interaction of regional styles and genres. We have observed a similar process while tracing the history of the movement of the Yakṣagana and Bhāgavatamelā in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The mysteries of this interaction and interpenetration are too numerous and too intricate to be unravelled here.

Gradually, but certainly, the Kṛṣṇa Yātrā did not remain restricated to the prototype of the three characters of the *Gīta-Govinda,* i.e., Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and Sakhī, or to the Paurāṇic stories. Historical writing, social satire and realism entered the arena and transformed the form from a devotional musical drama with lyrics, songs and dance to spoken drama in prose with interspersed passages and interludes of music, rhythm and movement. These new dramas ranged from the stories of Rāma, Śiva, Kāli to pure human romances. Rival groups representing the followers of particular deities or heroes presented plays simultaneously or sequentially. Mundane social drama, with a marked realism, inclusive of violence, murder, horror also entered into the body of the existing form. By the early 19th century there was already a flourishing tradition of Rāma Jātrā, Durgā Jātrā, Śiva Jātrā and the rest in Bengal. *Vidyāsundara* was one such romance of the 19th century which was popular in the Yātrās in Bengal. In Orissa, a historical play called Padmāvatī Haraṇa, written in 1834, became popular. This was followed by Raghunatha Paricha's *Gopīnathā Vāllabha naṭaka.* Rāmaśaṅkara Ray, who is often considered the father of modern Oriya drama, is the author of the popular historical romance entitled *Kāñchī-Kāverī.* The theme of the play revolves around the life of king Puruṣottamadeva and queen Padmāvatī. It was widely known in Bengal and became the theme of many stage plays. Rāmaśaṅkara gave it a new structure which became the model for many subsequent dramatic productions.

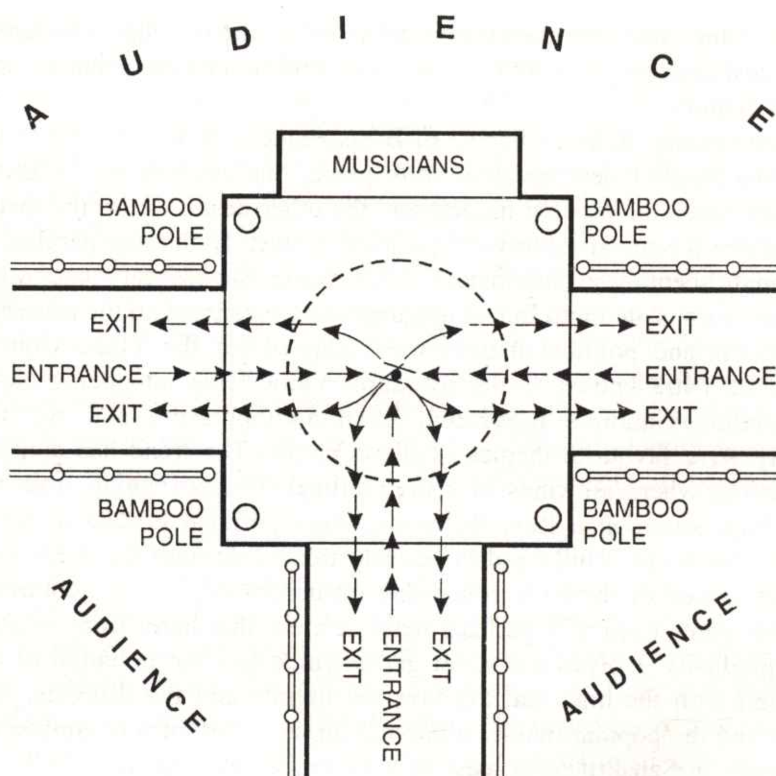
The term Svāṅga was also known as is borne out by the fact that Balarāmadāsa wrote a *Lakṣmī Purāṇa Svāṅga* in the 16th century. This tradition of the Svāṅga also continued until the 18th century.

In the 19th century, with the impact of British education and the rise of the national movement, two parallel developments took place, one relating to the growth of the modern theatre based on Western models and the other desire to use the medium of the traditional theatre for social reform and political protest. Both were parallel tendencies, logical although seemingly paradoxical. Thus while Shakespeare and other English playwrights were translated into Indian languages and presented on the proscenium stage, national concerns and political themes were adapted for the Yātrā. Consequently, a distinct form of Yātrā known as the Swadeshi Yātrā came into being particularly in Bengal. Mahatma Gandhi's movement of non-cooperation and the removal of untouchability were favourite themes of these Yātrās. The trend has continued in the post-1947 period, where all kinds of socio-political themes ranging from the lives of Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, Hitler and other political leaders to burning social problems have been powerfully and effectively treated through the medium.

This brief survey of the background and influences which have contributed to the making of the Yātrā form will perhaps make it clear that here, from small restrictive beginnings, gradually evolved a distinct genre which had the potential of establishing communication with the high and the low, the literate and the illiterate, the religious congregation and the popular masses alike. All through, the form continued its dialogue with the activity in Sanskrit or at least its survivals in the region.

The form could sustain itself, grow and transform only if there was an intrinsic quality of flexibility and an openness to change. At no point, from the Caitanya days to the 20th century, does it seem to have a static quality which was being passed on from generation to generation only with minimal changes and modifications as is characteristic of a few forms in other parts of India. This historical background has also to be supplemented with the sociological fact that the Yātrā, unlike the Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Bhāgavatamela and the actors of the parts of Rama, Kṛṣṇa, Sitā, Lakṣmaṇa in the Rāmalīlā and Rāsalīlā, is not the special preserve of the Brahminical caste. It is also not restricted to a particular non-Brahminical group of people like the Purulia or Mayurbhanj Chau. The actors of the Yātrās came from all sections of society: Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas. They can be farmers, peddlers, zamindars and clerks. Some are professional; others, amateurs who join Yātrā parties for specific periods and performances. The Jātrā theatre is rural, semi-urban and urban, and cannot, therefore, be classified as folk or classical theatre in sociological or artistic terms. Its peculiar history, with its association with religio-socio movements, perhaps accounts for this.

Let us look at the spectacle itself against this history and literary background. First, the venue and the stage. Although Bhāgavatagharas and maṭhas were perhaps the original venues of these performances, it was never restricted to the precincts of a temple courtyard or within the boundaries of a religious institution. As its very name signifies, it was a journey, a travel, involving a mobility which could take place anywhere, on the



farm or in the street or in closed theatre. It was and is not changing locale theatre like the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi or arena theatre like the Purulia Chau.

A sixteen feet square, and two and a half feet high platform constitute the stage called the *āsara*. Two ramps run on two sides, at a height of about two feet. One of these seat the percussion players, with drums (dholak), cymbals and bells: on the other are seated the instrumentalists, comprising a clarinet player, a flutist, violinist, trumpet players and today a harmonium player. From one corner of the stage runs a gangway which is made up of short strips of bamboo and ropes. The nearly sixty feet gangway provides communication between the green room and the stage. A similar device is used by Purulia Chau. The gangway serves several purposes: it can suggest a street, a highway, a temple path, the venue of a procession or the place of an army to assemble before it reaches the actual acting area. Poles are erected on the four sides of the stage and these are the light stands. Originally oil lamps were mounted on them as in the case of the Nāmaghara stage. Today bulbs and other lights are fixed on the poles. Sometimes a canopy is fastened on the poles and covers the stage. Strings of light on thin ropes are fastened to provide extra lighting. The audience sits on all sides with one side reserved for women.

There is hardly any property or models unlike the Aṅkiā-nāṭa or the Bhāonā. Usually

there is only a chair, which serves multiple purposes as and; when other properties or props are required the actors carry these themselves and take them back themselves.

As in the case of other theatre forms, the main Yātrā performance is preceded by some preliminaries. However, these preliminaries are neither held inside the greenroom as in Yakṣagāna, nor behind a curtain as in the case of Kṛṣaṭṭam, Aṅkiā-naṭa or Rāsalīlā. Here they constitute the singing of a melody and the playing of several instruments. The *rāgas* used are many, including Śyama, Kalyāṇi Bihāga, Pūravī, etc. The playing of the instruments is followed by singing of the same melodic line. Soon after the conclusion of the musical overture, a group of dancers rush in from the gangway and begin a dance. Often the group dance is followed by a solo dance. These dances are the survivals of the conventions of the *pūrvaraṅga* and the *pindi-bandhas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra,*

Mythological episodes from the life of Kṛṣṇa, Sivā or Durgā follow. A popular episode is that of the Mahiṣāsuramardinī. This is presented with a great deal of dance and colourful dramatic effects. The section concludes with a tableaux-like freezing of all characters.

The play then begins, usually on a high note with the sounding of trumpets and playing of drums, with the clang and clash of bells. The prelude, the pantomime and the instrumental music all serve the same purpose as the parupāddu in Kathākali and the other initial sequences of Yakṣagāna which precede the actual action. The actors enter with stylized walking and stances, and although there is no set vocabulary of movement patterns, and a body of *aṅgikābhinaya* cannot be discerned, there is a very definite Yātrā style of moving, walking, dancing. This is even more pronounced in the case of the acting. The style is declamatory, melodramatic. The script is recited or sung and has sung verse passages as in the case of Bhāgavatamelā. The pattern of the *campu* and the *vacana* is repeated. It is not known whether the earlier Kṛṣṇa Jātrā or the Kāliyadamana Jātrās followed the same pattern, but today the melodramatic style of acting with a great deal of singing and dancing is characteristic.

Considering that music played an important part in the shaping of the Yātrā form, it is not surprising that in course of time, it became less poetic or lyrical in gliding tune and more self-consciously musical and urbane. The principal actors became solo-singers of great repute and different lyrics of the drama were sung in highly elaborate *rāgas* of the Hindustani classical music system. The existing forms of Jhumar (duet songs with dance and dialogue, also popular in Assam and Orissa), the *Kīrtana* type of singing, the pure recitation (Kavigāna), the techniques of the *pāncālī* (a type of solo-singer performance which survives with the *pàa* singers) and the Kathākāra and Cāraṇa reciting their verses with some gesticulation were all employed in the beginning. This gave Jātrā a rich mosaic pattern. The unproportionate reliance on the elaborate *rāga* led to long pauses in the otherwise swift dramatic action. A natural development was the introduction of the Juḍi system or proxy where the verse passages were sung not by the actors on the stage, but by the musicians who sat on the ramps, or at four corners of the stage. The actor sang the first line and then lazily settled down on one corner of the stage, while the singers in each of the corners took up the line and began to sing it in turns. This part then became

a music concert where four singers rendered the same melody *(rāga)* through individual elaborations and interpretations. All this led to the dissociation of the word and the musical sound so integral to all other theatrical traditions. The singing of the verses by the Juḍi singers who are also called Mukhtayārs (a Persian word meaning attorneys) cannot be compared, as has been done by some critics, to the singing or recitation of the Vyāsa the Svāmi in the Rāmalīlā or Rāsalīlā. In the latter the *Sūtradhāra* or the Sattrādhikārī, or the Vyāsa or Svāmī, provides the interlinking passages which serve the function of suggesting a change of locale or transitory stages in the development of the story. Here the action of the drama is suddenly suspended and the actors return to different portions of the stage to relax, chat or smoke. Of late, the Juḍi system has been totally given up.

Another convention of singing, fairly popular even today, is that of the "dohar" or the "dohā". Originally a metrical pattern common to early Bengali, Avadhi, Rajasthani, etc., here it takes on the character of a refrain which is repeated by a section of the public. All in all, these features have resulted in some richness but also a loosening of the rigorous structure of the Yātrā form.

We will have noticed that the Yātrā is conspicuous by its absence of the character of the narrator-actor, the *Sūtradharā* or the Bhāgavatar. This lacuna was made up by an imaginative innovation in the early 20th century by Mathur Shah. He introduced the character of the Viveka (literally meaning conscience). The Viveka was an amalgam of the *Sūtradhāra* and the *Vidusaka* of traditional Sanskrit theatre. He could appear when he liked, where he liked, and could stand apart and comment on the dramatic action, enter into dialogue with the actor as if in reply to the actor's internal questionings and conflicts, and was the voice of justice, moral order and conscience. He stood often at the gangway and entered the acting area representing a room, palace or a garden and receded back into the gangway. He lived in the past, present and future and moved freely in dramatic time and space. Some writers did not consider him a character apart as a timeless old man, beggar or guru but assigned the role to one of the characters of the play, specially those who could philosophise on life and deliver sermons. Bhīṣma of the *Mahābhārata* and Vibhīṣaṇa of the *Rāmāyāṇa* lent themselves eminently to perform this function. Nevertheless the dual role of a character in a play and the function of a commentator and chorus was and is not always easy to sustain. The Viveka who is outside the drama has greater freedom and is able to play a more significant role. Naturally, this part is played by veteran actors, who can sing and command the total attention of the audience. This device is also followed or given up by contemporary playwrights or directors.

The Yātrā actors are all men, as those in many other forms all over India, and the calibre of an actor is understandably judged by his ability to play successfully the role of a woman. The well-known female role actors often suffix the name of Rānī to their names, so that they can be distinguished from those others who only play male roles.

The costuming of the Yātrā is interesting, representing many moments of time. They can be dressed in a vague kind of period costumes, or in an attire which brings no

associations with real life. The make-up is awesome and powerful but not sophisticated and stylized as in the case of Yakṣāgana or Kāthakalī. All kinds of paints ranging from grease, earth colours, chemical colours, white lead, collyrium, red paint are used. Stripes, lines on the face are drawn according to the character: the demons are particularly fearsome where teeth are painted on upper lip. The snarls and the gnashing of teeth with this make-up are fearful. The make-up, although effective is a far cry from the smooth and pleasant masks of Seraikala, the stylization of other make-up styles and the naturalistic make-up of Khyāla, Bhavāi, etc.

When compared to the dance-drama forms of Southern India on the one hand and those of Ramalila and Rasalila on the other, the Yātrā is a distinct category. In spite of its music and dance, its techniques of suggestion through conventions of indicating different locale and absence of props and properties, it is more-drama and theatre than dance-drama or opera. It is today not ritualistic at all and it is doubtful if it was so in the near past. Over the years, its social organization pattern has also become commercialised. A private individual controls it, and the troupes are engaged by people through middlemen or "dalals". Each group maintains a core of about ten to twelve permanent artists; the others are engaged on contract or "ṭheka". A successful Yātrā actor can earn anything from Rs 1000/- to Rs 3000/- a month.* The Yātrā in both artistic and sociological terms has shown a progressive, quick change which we do not witness in many other forms. On one level it is abreast of the times, and little wonder that modern directors and producers have been drawn to it as to few other forms except the Tamāsa. Yātrā is the other polarity, between the Kuṭiyaṭṭam on the one hand and the Vraja Rāsa on the other. However, both have to be seen as extremes within a circle and not as independent unconnected forms. The Yātrā forms are an important branch of the parent tree of Indian literatures, languages and theatre forms. Its survivals appear to have thrown seeds which have given modern Bengali theatre a new direction.

Like the Bhavāi and the Tamāśā it has provided an Indian format to *avant-garde* theatre. Possibly this renewed interest in Yātrā was conditioned by the advent of a new form of epic theatre from Europe. Be as it may, the European influence generated an interest in national traditions and this has been a return educational journey homeward for the modern theatre of India.

* As per the early 80s.

XII

BHAVĀI

While speaking of the Rāsalīlā and the Aṅkiā-nāṭa we have drawn attention to the evolution of Gujarati language. Although opinions differ on whether or not Gujarati was an off shoot Apabhraṁśa, it is clear that about the 13th century a language with a distinct identity had come into being.

As in other parts of India, in Gujarat also two parallel movements can be discerned between the 6th and 13th - 14th centuries. While on the one hand, the region continued to be the home of many important writers of Sanskrit literature, including the famous Bhoja, Hemacandra, Someśvara and Rāmacandra, on the other, there was the rise of the *desī bhāṣās* which were an amalagm of the many dialects indigenous to the tribes of the region and the later forms of Apabhralilsa.

Also, the same period witnessed the prolific output of the Jaina writers. We have referred to the emergence of the *rāsaka* and *rāsa* of the Jaina tradition. The *Bharateśvara Bāhubalī Rāso* of Śailabhadra of the 12th century and the works of Taruṅa-prabhā, etc. of the 14th century constitute the first important works of Gujarati literature.

Rāsa was known to the region early and the tribes of Gujarat such as the Abhīras, Saryātas and Vṛiṣṅis worshipped Kṛṣṇa as the cowherd hero. The lyrics composed to accompany the dance of the rāsa were in a dialect of the Sauraseni Prākrta. Considerable literature must have grown around the rāsa in Gujarat for the writer of the *Saptakṣetrīrāsa,* an old Gujarati work of the 13th century; to classify it and to distinguish the *pālārāsa* from the *lakuṭārāsa*. The first denoted a dance with clapping, and the second a dance with sticks.

The *garabī* or *garabā* was a local dance tradition which revolved around an earthern jar called a "garabi" or a "manāḍavi" which was a wooden frame about three feet in height, decorated with tinsel and illuminated with many lamps — all in honour of the Goddess Amba or Ambika. The dance was part of the nine or ten-day long Navarātri festival which has great agricultural and ritual significance.

The rise of the *desī bhāsās,* the adoption of the Kṛṣṇa cult by the Abhīras etc., the prevalence of the *garabī* festivities, allied to the development of a class of literature which was called by the generic term rāsa or rāsaka, or rāso or phāgu.

By the l4th century the use of the word rāsa had undergone many transformations. Although there were vague reminiscences of the *Harivaṁśsa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* the term no longer denoted a composition of a pure dance only. It stood for a long narrative

in rhymed verse. The literary piece used Apābhraṁśa metres; it envisaged that the rhymed verses like *duhā* and *caupāi* would be set to music, mostly to melodies termed as the *desī rāgas.* There is abundant reference in the musical texts of the period, particularly the *Saṅgita Ratnākara* of Sāṛṅgadeva, to this class of *rāgas.*

The transformation of pure dance to a narrative dramatic singing was complementary to the gradual shift of emphasis in the Sanskrit drama from the spoken to the sung word, as is evident from a comparison of the plays of Kalidāsa and Rājaśekhara. This led to the sung word being presented in dramatic form to the comparative neglect of the recited word or prose passages, as the mainstay of communication in the theatre. Alongside was the direct or at times oblique influence of *Gīta-Govinda* and the Prabandha form in which it was set. The use of *rāga* and *tāla* for a literary composition became a set pattern in all parts of India.

By the 14th century the *rāsaka* and the *phāgu* were popular forms of literary and musical composition common to the Jaina and Hindu traditions. Somasulidara's *Raṅgasāgara Nemiphāgu,* written in the l4th-15th century, was a charming composition in this form; so also was an important poem called the *Vasantavilāsa,* written in the 15th century. It was clearly modelled on the *Gīta-Govinda,* although occasionally it surpassed the latter in explicit erotic imagery. The poem inspired many beautiful illustrated manuscripts on the subject. The *Phāgu* of *Naṭarṣi* was another outstanding poem of the same genre in the 15th century.

Prose writing was also extant and many Jaina sadhus wrote kāthas which were not presented in the lyrical sung format of the *rāsa, rāsaka* and *phāgu.* The themes of these kāthas ranged from the didactic to the secular, full of irony and satire. Taruna- prabha and Somasundara were also authors of this form. They drew their material from many sources and often the kāthas revolved around historical personalities.

By the 15th century thus, there were many literary and theatre genres in vogue and these in turn were followed by the emergence of yet another form of recited ballad or heroic poem. *Ranamallacanda* and *Kānhaḍade Prabandha* of the 14th and 15th centuries along with the *Revantagiri Rāsu* of Vijay Sena and *Kusuma Śrirāsa* of Gangavijaya, both belonging to the 17th century, were typical examples of this new concern with heroic and historical content undered in the form of a recited ballad, rather than a musical piece.

This brief literary history has to be supplemented with political history of Gujarat which was full of invasions, wars and battles. The sack of the Somanātha temple, the establishment of the Sultanate and other happenings in Gujarat are well known and need no repeating. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the arts, particularly literature, miniature painting and theatre (it was not possible to undertake great architecture, although the temples of Mt. Abu, etc. also belong to the early part of this period), flourished at a time of political unrest and upheaval. Naturally, the artistic expressions also reflected the times, although prima facie, their concern may have been only with the past. Through the conventional format of the *rāsaka*, etc. many realistic portrayals of historical characters and social events were presented.

The artists communicated to the people through the language of the theatre and used

it as a powerful medium of teaching and training. There was a revival of Pauranic themes where old themes were being used to convey new message. Finally, there was the pervasive *bhakti* cult, and the contribution of the saint-poets and singers like Narasiṁha Mehtā, Bhālaṇa and Akho.

Gujarat was also undergoing the same cultural process of assimilation of new ideas through adoption of some alien modes and revival of old forms as had happened in other parts of India and what we continue to see until the 19th century, as will be clear in our discussion on Svāṅga, Nāutankī, etc.

Bhālaṇa was the spokesman of these trends in Gujarat and all his works speak of this desire to give new meaning to old content and antique forms. While he drew his thematic inspiration from the *Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇalīlā Carita,* he made a free use of the *garabi* form specially in works which revolve around Sri Kṛṣṇa's life. All in all he became a pioneer of a new movement in Gujarat and was followed by the great saint-poets, particularly Mīrābai, who is also claimed by Rajasthan, and Narisṁha Mehtā.

It is important to remember this rough outline of Gujarati literature in order to understand the emergence of a theatre form which seemingly has no connections today with the literary history of Gujarat and is considered purely folk and is the preserve by and large of a special group of people called the Bhavāyās, a socially backward group. This impression is undoubtedly confirmed by the lack of literary evidence and the non-existence of urban patronage, until the fifties of this century.

Nevertheless, we shall presently see that notwithstanding its dissociation from the temples, the social elite and literary drama, it incorporated many features of the Sanskrit tradition and of the forms peculiar to Gujarat as mentioned above.

The social history of Bhāvai perhaps accounts for this dissociation and comparative neglect of Paurāṇic themes so pronounced in other dance-drama forms of India. It is said that Bhāvai owes its origins to a person called Asitā, or Asaitā, an Audicya Brahmin of Unjhā in Mehsāṇa district. According to the oral history of his descendants (who today comprise the community called the Bhavāyās), Asitā or Asaitā was a priest who was excommunicated for having rescued a Kaṇabī girl from a Muslim's house and having later married her. He was a good actor-singer and he began to compose and perform Bhavāis after this event. His descendants comprise the large community called by the name or Bhāvayās. They are also known as the Targalās and are divided into subgroups, namely the Bhojakas or Nāyakas and the Bhavāyās. The Bhojakas sometimes call themselves Vyās. The Bhavāis today move in *maṇḍalīs* or groups of 10 to 15 from village to village and perform from October to June. They are sustained by the villagers and are all paid remuneration for their performance.

In Rajasthan a similar version of the story is in vogue, although this time it is a jāt and not a Brahmin who was excommunicated. The Rājputs and the Jāṭ excommunicated a person called Nāgāji for his love of music and dance. They gave him a *nagārā* and *bhuṅgal*, the typical musical instruments of the Bhavāi players (even today) and jājam, a cotton carpet, and asked him to be the wandering Bhāṅḍ-Bhavāi for the Rajputs and the Jāṭs. The descendants of Nāgāji are known as the Bhavāi actors of Rājputānā.

He and his descendants like his counterparts in Gujarat were devotees of Ambā-devi or Śitalā devī. Some scholars have suggested that the word Bhāvai has been derived from Bhū-āyi, i.e., being possessed by the devī of Śitalā or small-pox. Other scholars have tried to give it a literary and artistic meaning by breaking it up into Bhāva and vahī, i .e., the communicator of *bhāva,* emotions or sentiments. All these varied interpretations of the ancestors of the community and derivations of the word lead to two common conclusions. The first is that the community or class of people who normally perform the Bhavāi represent a downward mobility in terms of social status; and the second, that they are all worshippers of the devī whether in the form of Ambā or Sakti or Śitala. Further, that the performers are itinerant and move from place to place.

The Bhavāi performance however is by no means restricted to this special out-caste group. The tribals such as the Turīs and the Bhīls also perform Bhavāi. Alongside, the Bhavāi as a genre of performance is important in the Navarātra festival — along with the *garabās* and *garābis* mentioned above. Here it is part of a ritual to the Goddess Amba, in which Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas take part. Other communities, such as Kāchiyā (vegetable sellers), Hajāma (barbers), Darajī (tailors), Telī (oil-sellers), Kolīs and Vāgharī, also present Bhavāi either as part-time professional or an amateur recreational activity.

It will be evident from the above that even in terms of social strata the Bhavāi performance, in spite of all its association with excommunication, is not exclusive to the community. The Nāgara Brahmins and until the 19th century some princes and the koḷis alike are participants in a similar type of worship and performance.

From this social background, naturally one would expect the emergence of a type of drama which is ritualistic in part and would also provide scope for social comment, even satire and irony. The dramatic spectacle this time is not a unifying forum where all sections of the community take part (although this also happens) but it is a pure artistic format in which both spiritual and mundane concerns are expressed by different groups separately, almost all on the occasion of Navarātri with Ambā devī or Śakti as the presiding deity.

Both Asitā or Asāitā and the Nāgara Brahmins must no doubt have been familiar with the *rāsa, rāsaka*, the *kathās* and the *saṅgita naṭaka* of the later Sanskrit tradition. The Bhavaī of Gujarat could not have been born overnight through the excommunication of Asāitā Thākura. He dexterously used all these forms to create a new whole which not only took over and carried forward many of the salient features of the earlier forms but also introduced some new ones, particularly the skills of acrobatics which must have been a common sight in the countryside. Amongst these was the tradition of the *beḍa-nṛtya* or dancing with pots which has been known to many parts of India for centuries. The Koottu of Kerala and Tamil Nadu with single or multiple pots is captured in stone in the Kidangur and other temples in Kerala and seen in many Rajasthani paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries. Other acrobatic feats have been assimilated into the form. All these elements, some drawn from literary sources and others relating to the acrobatic skills, were incorporated to make another whole.

We find thus that into the making of Bhavāi have entered many factors. All seemingly exclusive, belonging to different social levels and artistic streams, and mutually conflicting, but in the Bhavai they were all assimilated to create a new form. It is this coming together of many strands and colours of the warp and woof to weave a new pattern which has made sociologists and art historians call Bhavāi and other allied forms either as low-folk drama or eulogise them as the direct descendants of the 'great traditions' of Indian drama. The picture is, as we see it, more complex and intricate and sociological or artistic yardsticks separately do not provide answers. The two must be taken together.

The performance itself, whether near a temple or in an open space, is held with great enthusiasm as part of the Navarātri festivities. A large number of *maṇḍapas* or *paṇḍalas* are erected and decorated with date palm leaves, flowers and the like. Patch work, applique work, and *cākla* wall-decorations are common and bead curtains hang from poles in the four corners often. The shrine of Ambā or Śakti is represented through an earthern jar called the *garabi* or a structure called *maṇḍavi* described above. Sometimes the shrine of the *garabi* is kept on one side of the *paṇḍala* and the musicians sit opposite, yet at other times the earthern lamp and *garabi* are kept in the dressing room which is about 100 feet away from the acting areas, and here a symbolic figure of the Ambā is represented by drawing the Triśūḷa (the trident) of the goddess. The lighting of the lamp, the drawing of the trident and the actors paying obeisance to it before beginning the performance are rituals parallel, as we have observed, to other forms like Yakṣagāna and Chau. Whether in the green room or on the stage, the first act of the Bhavāi actor, whether a Bhavāyā or a Bhil or a Brahmin, is to bow to the *garabi* and ask for blessings of the Goddess Amba representing Śakti (or Devī).

The significance of the *ghaṭa* as a fertility symbol is well known. The *Maṇgala ghata* appears early in Indian art and continues for many centuries. It has an equally important part to play in the performing arts. We saw its ritual significance in the context of Mayurbhanj and Śeraikala Chau. In these forms the *ghala* rituals were more elaborate but the basic symbolism of the earthen jar representing energy *(śakti)* and fullness is the same everywhere, whether in Eastern or Western India. It is true even at the tribal level, where the ritual and artistic expression of the ghoṭa symbolism has something to do with the agricultural function.

The Nāyaka is the director and producer of the performance. He draws a circle with a twenty feet diameter and this constitutes the acting area specially when a raised square platform is not erected. The musicians sit on one side, and the audience surrounds the acting area. The act of drawing the circle automatically brings about a demarcation of an area which is consecrated for the performance.

The obeisance to the *garabi* is sung by the actors, the Nāyaka and the musicians. The actors then retire to the greenroom. This is a brief and effective ritual which precedes the performance. Thereafter the singers, amongst the musicians, sing the *āvaṇi* or *āvaṇu*, literally meaning coming or entry, exactly in the same manner as the *praveśa dāru* of the Bhāgavatamelā forms. The *bhuṅgal*, a copper wind instrument, is blown and this heralds

the re-entry of the actor on the stage to present one or more episodes. Often the first number is an invocation to Gaṇeśa and is known as the Gaṇeśa *veśa*. The Gaṇeśa of Bhavāi does not wear a mask, instead he holds a brass plate in front of his face and moves it constantly in the course of his performance.

All entries to and exits from the acting area (known as the "paudh") are through a narrow passage or gangway which connects the acting area and the greenroom. After much impressive dancing to the accompanying invocation to Gaṇeśa, the actor runs back to the greenroom.

This sequence is followed by the presentation of a Brahmin stock character, called the "Brāhmaṇ veśa", close on its heels, yet a third short sequence called "the Kabā and his wife Jaṭaḍi" is presented. These three are essential preludes to the presentation of a story or a number of stories. Special episodes are also earmarked for particular days of the Navarātra festivals.

This preliminary section with its clear cut phasing moves almost at the same pace as those of the sophisticated forms which had greater antiquity and a vast body of creative and critical literature to support them. The Bhavāi also moves from the abstract symbolism of the earthen jar to the more concrete worship of Gaṇeśa with a charming stylization: the dimension shifts, the mood changes, and like the ridiculing of the four *Puruṣārthas* in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, we hear the first gentle satire directed at Brahmins. The plane of operation shifts once again, and this time we are in the midst of downright earthy domesticity. Will we call this religious or secular drama ?

The musicians sit on one side throughout and the orchestra comprise the *bhuṅgal* mentioned above, a drummer (pakhawājī) and a sārangī player, the cymbal or jhānjha player and today the harmonium player. The Nāyaka is a singer, vocalist, narrator-director combined. He is also the counterpart of the Nāṭṭuvanar of the Southern forms because he recites the mnemonics or the *bols* at the beginning of the performance as also in between, when characters perform pure dance; sometimes he also gives discourses at the end of the performance.

The three short sequences mentioned above are followed by dramatic pieces, some short, others long, all called *veśa*, a term uniformly used in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Gujarat, etc. for different character types. In the context of Bhavāi it denotes themes short or long, and not character types or make-up categories. The excommunicated Asāitā is credited with the authorship of many such *veśa* in Gujarat. In Rajasthan authorship is attributed to others. Like the Khyāla, but unlike some of the Southern forms, the themes are not restricted to Paurāṇic stories; indeed, social themes, political episodes and historical romances are great favourites.

Some are mythological like Kānā-Gopī (Kṛṣṇa-gopī), Rāma-Rāvaṇa and Ardhanārśvara; and others historical like Jasmā-Oḍaṇ, Rāmadeva, Jaisingh. Most revolve around social themes and aim at pricking the bubbles of the hypocrisy of genteel society. Asāitā is supposed to be the author of 350 such *veśa* or playlets. Here such ills of society as the marriage of an old man to a young bride, or polygamy, or the hypocrisy of the baniyās, etc., are exposed. Burlesque, horseplay, wit, satire, virtuoso, dancing, etc.

characterise the performance of the Bhavāi. Jūṭhaṇ Miāṅ and Jhaṇḍā Jhulaṇ are two such plays which are extraordinarily popular. The audience responds with roars of laughter and the applause of the audience excites the actor to improvise and extemporise as he goes along. The *Ranglo* is *the Vidūṣaka* or the fool who is in and out of the dramatic action. He, like the *Vidūśaka* of the Kuṭiyaṭṭaṁ, who connects the past and the present, is the voice of conscience and the wise objective spectator. His role can be a part or fulfilled by one of the characters of the playas in the case of Viveka in Yātrā.

The performance is set in *duhās, caupāis,* songs and prose passages and is interspersed by the speaking of the *bols* of the Nāyaka, his singing and his comment. In all details of dramatic structure concerning the entry or the development of the character or the rendering of the lines in recited verse and sung passages, it follows the universal pattern we have seen elsewhere. The narrative method is a take-over from the *kathās,* the singing styles of the *sāngitakas* and the free lyrical method of the *rāsakas* of the literary tradition.

Female roles are played by men as in other forms. The entry of the female character is marked by a special dance with lighted lamps: this dance called the Kāñcaḷḷiyā. The lighted lamps are known as the Kākaḍās. The actor in the female role enters through the gangway clasping the lighted lamps tightly with a thumb and a finger. She (i.e. he) moves the lamps in different directions, places her hands on her head and in doing so, she symbolically pays homage to the Ambā devī, and her guru the Nayaka. She bows to the instrumentalists, and then kneels on the ground. First to the accompaniment of the drum she sings her lines: thereafter the musicians often take over and he presents mime to the sung line. This is full of facial expression or *mukhaja abhinaya.* Next follows a full sequence of pure dance, performed in the same manner as the *nṛtta* or pure dance of any other style, where foot-work predominates. She (i.e.he) weaves many rhythmic patterns to the metrical cycle *(tāla)* played on the percussion instruments, particularly the *pakhwāj* and sometimes the *ḍholak.* The usual cluster of mnemonics *(bols)* are recited in a set synchronised or asynchronised pattern to the basic melody or *tāla.* In turn, the dancer interprets these through movements, specially of the feet. Composition of *toḍā* tukdā of Kathak etc., analogous to the "jatis" or *śolukaṭṭu* of the Southern styles is in evidence also here. However, in rendering rhythmic pieces, the postures of the dancer are not stylized as in some of these forms. The straight vertical stance is often determined by the dancer's holding lights or pots; at other times there is the free use of the hips with minimal upper limbs and arm movements. Indeed, visually and aurally, there is a vague similarity of movements and rhythmic composition between Bhavāi and Khyālā on the one hand and Bhavāi and portions of Tamāśā where *nṛtta* (or pure dance) is performed, on the other, though of course, in details each is quite distinct. The Bhavāi dancer uses flat foot contacts much more than Tamāśā where the toe or heel is used. This accounts for the fact that a highly skilled dancer also brings associations of Kathak; nevertheless, the Bhavāi style has its own peculiarities and cannot be mistaken for anything else. The *bhuṇgaḷ* provides moments of accentuation or pauses after fast pirouettes, and the orchestra supports this play of rhythm between the *pakhawāj* player and the dancer.

Dance enters into Bhavāi not only through solo dances of actors who play female roles, but also through a variety of group dances, mostly by those playing female roles. In these sections, the typical steps and movement patterns of the *garabā* and *garabī* are freely used. Indeed, the transition from one dramatic phase to another is often brought about through such dances. It also enters into the structure of the play when the actor gesticulates along with the song and uses dance steps and *gātis* to cover the spatial area of the stage. As in other forms, dance here is an integral part of the theatrical spectacle and is not an embellishment which can be dispensed with.

Again, as in the case of Aṇkiā-nāṭa or Bhāonā, Khyāla and Yakṣagāna, etc. the musical compositions are drawn both from the system of *ragas* and *tālas* of Hindustani classical music and rural or local melodies. Amongst the *ragas,* Desā, Sāranga Pūrvī, Rāmakalī, Asāvarī are popular. The traditional forms of melodies of the rāsa, garāba, bhajan, and ghazal are also freely used. A dexterous combination of different types of musical composition, one highly structured and the other free, moves simultaneously in harmony and there is little incongruity. We have observed the phenomenon in the context of practically all theatrical creations of this genre throughout India. These structural features of format and technique provide an underlying unity to these forms which otherwise lie far apart in themes, content and language.

In the sphere of costuming Bhavāi, like the Jātrā and the Khyālā, presents a picture of the coexistence of many moments of time or, let us say, anachronistic features. A king's costume may be period costume, precisely datable, and yet some element of the local contemporary costume of Gujarat villages may be added to it. The Brahmin has the set costume of a *dhotī,* a bare chest, the sacred thread or a "janeu" and a towel or *gāmchā* thrown on his shoulder. Other characters, such as policemen, etc. may well be in modern costume. Both in Khyālā and in Bhavāi it is not uncommon to see the dress of the contemporary constable in a play which is otherwise set in the 16th or 17th centuries. Stock characters like Jūṭhaṇ Miān and Ranglo and some others can be distinguished by their special costuming and make-up which belong to the world of only the theatre and not life. While the other characters do not wear special make-up except for the usual attempt to exaggerate eye-brows and moustaches etc. For the Jūṭhaṇ Miān role, chalk lines are drawn on forehead, along the eyebrows and the bridge of the nose etc., red and black dots are put on the cheeks, and all in all there is as if a conscious attemp to transform the character from the world of actuality to the world of theatre. Jūṭhaṇ Miān often also wears a Turkish or Afghani Kula (conical cap) and ties a turban around it; tassels hang on either side. In short, while the make-up seeks to dissociate the character from an identification with actuality, the rest of his costume, turban, baggy trousers (akin to a salvār), his overshirt and waist are reminiscent vaguely of characters of the Sultanate period of Gujarat history.

Women characters are dressed in a variety of ways, ranging from the *sari* to the skirt but the typical Gujarati *oḍhṇī* (half *sāri)* is a must. While the skirt is most appropriate for the spins and pirouettes of the dancer, the *oḍhṇī* is used effectively in a number of ways for dramatic purpose. The married woman is suggested if the *oḍhṇī* covers the face,

the unmarried if she does not, and the throwing away of the *oḍhṇī* has other suggestive uses.

Turbans of characters indicate their social status, their vocation and the dominant traits of their character. A slight tilt, a change in angle, the combination of a particular type of a *dhotī* with another type of upper garment, the style of tying the turban, all immediately convey a particular message: it may suggest a special locality, or a hierachical status or an inner character trait. These devices, whether consciously achieved or assimilated gradually, are effective and essential for a fuller communication with the audiences for whom the Bhavai is enacted.

The lighting is provided by the barber or the *hajam*, who stands with lighted torches on wooden or bamboo poles somewhere about half way along the depth of the stage or the acting arena (Paudh *cācar*). He flashes these torches against the faces of the actors at dramatic moments and follows some actors freely along the stage as they perform. He assists the women dancer to put the lamps at the conclusion of the performance and flashes torch against the face of the dancers to specially illuminate an expression or a dance movement. We had noticed a similar lighting device in the case of the Aṅkia-nāṭa or Bhāona. The part which baby-spots and follow-lamps play in modern electrical lighting technique was fulfilled by these devices of torches and flashes and by coming near the central lamp in Kuṭiyaṭṭam or Kathvākali, etc. The subdued lighting in open air or closed enclosures with these sudden flashes is always effective in the creation of an illusion of the drama, and many elements of such forms which appear garish, overstated and loud against electric lighting, appear pleasant and communicative with this system. Flat white foot-lights and overhead floods and patromax lamps indiscriminately used have been, without doubt, a negative influence qualitatively. The indigenous lighting is as integral to the play as its content, reciting, singing, dancing, costuming and make-up techniques.

Like the Nāutankī, Khyāla and to an extent the Jātrā and the Tamāśā, the recent history of Bhāvai has been one of many vicissitudes determined by socio-economic factors. While the Bhavāi continued to be enacted by the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas in front of the Ambā temples, particularly in Bhavanagar and Baroda, as an essential part of the Navarātri festival celebrations, the professional community of the Bhavāyās presented a form of Bhavāi which was down to earth street-theatre verging on vulgarity and in crude taste. This, as we have seen, happened in varying degrees also to the Jātrā and the Nautankī and in a different context but with a difference to the "sadir nṛtya" of Tamil Nadu and "nautch" of Northern India. It needed the touch of a genius, a self conscious effort of a creative intellectual, to give it a new impetus and a fresh meaning. Amongst others, the work of Jaishankar Bhojak "Sundari" in the thirties and forties of this century has been as significant here as the work of a Vallathol in the context of Kathākali or Rukmini Devi in the context of Bharatanātyam. Jaishankar "Sundari", a veteran actor, presented Gujarati plays in the form of *Bhavbāi* and took the female role himself. He was ably supported later by Deena Gandhi. Their joint production of *Mena Gurjarī* in the early fifties will remain a landmark in the history of the contemporary revival and even

transformation of the Bhavāi form from street and rural theatre to viable modern theatre. Two trends continued: one, the urban director using the form for modern theatre to experiment and innovate; the other, gradually cleansing the form from some of its crudities and vulgarities. Deena Gandhi and Shanta Gandhi have been the exponents of the first trend in their highly successful productions of *Mena Gurjarī* and *Jasmā Oḍaṇ* respectively. Pransukh Nayak and Vithaaldasa Nayak in Gujarat and Devilal Samar in Rajasthan have been the leaders of the other trend. Their parallel efforts with different visions have all contributed in bringing the richness of the form to the larger stream of Indian theatre. Younger theatre directors of Delhi, Ahmedabad and Bombay have experimented with the form in the last two or three decades.

We find thus that a form which was born in the 16th century had its links with literary and dramatic developments of a period which antedated it by many centuries, and certainly those like the *rāsaka* which can be dated to 9th or 10th centuries. It began by incorporating elements of ritual theatre, and of the fertility cult practices connected with Navarātri. Later, it became associated with the worship of Ambā and also acquired stylistic and technical features of the later Sanskrit theatre of the Sattaka type and of the Saṅgītaka, the *rāsaka* and *rāso* of the Jain narrative dramatic theatre. It gradually shed its literary base of mythological (Paurāṇic) stories and gave priority only to the social themes while continuing to adhere to the formal elements of the earlier theatre. Through lack of support of written literature, it became the domain only of unwritten drama of the oral tradition and was confined in the main to particular social strata or special occasions. The nationalist movement and the urge to look for indigenous roots revived it and in course of time it became part of the aspirations and objectives connected with the *avant-garde* theatre. This summing up of its history in bare outline will perhaps once again convince us that neither conceptually nor in actual history were the so-called *Mārgī* and *Deśī* forms two watertight compartments. On the contrary, they have been complementary traditions, embodying segments within a circle, but with the constant possibility of overlap or transformtion and transmutation caused by changes in social milieu, literacy script or any other factor. Nāṭyadharmī (stylization, abstraction) and Lokadharmī (realistic, popular), the two other concepts, were a matter of style, flavour and tenor and not just of social level. The Chau forms are on the level of social milieu and, in the absence of a rigorous literary script, may be called *Deśī* today. Their style of presentation is all in the Nāṭyadharmī where many conventions and techniques of abstraction along with a highly chiselled vocabulary are used. The Bhavāi, as a form of drama and ritual connected with Ambādevī and performed by Brahmins and princes during the course of the Nāvaratri festival, may be with some validity classified as *Mārgī* in terms of social status but not artistically. In terms of social status, it is certainly *Deśī* when performed by the *bhavāyas*, the *koḷīs* and the *kaṅsārās*. However, in all situations, in dramatic style it has greater affinities with Lokadharmi rather than Nāṭyadharmī, although the many conventions of the stage certainly belong to the spheres of the former and not the latter.

We see thus that here also the classification of theatre into classical and folk is not

fully applicable. Such terms as classical and folk indicate only relative emphasis and distinct flavours and not exclusive areas where the one shuts out the other. This pattern of mobility, of interaction and interpenetration, is the universal Indian phenomenon in many spheres but is most equivocally seen in actual operation in the field of theatre. A fuller self conscious understanding of these systems of in built flexibility which cut across social stratification may well lead to the evolution of conceptual models other than those followed so far by sociologists and art historians. The different levels of performance are like concentric circles, all parts of a larger circular. In Gujarat, thus, we see that the Sanskrit tradition, the evolution of the space *Deśī bhāṣas,* the evolution of the *rāsakas* of the Jaina tradition, and the *kāthas* of all traditions are the different concentric circles within the larger circle, in literary terms. Again, in sociological terms, the ritual of the Brahmins, the rites of the agriculturists and of the tribals like the kaṇabīs, etc. are such divergent lines in the same circle. In artistic terms, in the context of the performing arts, a particular form like the Bhavāi serves as a link to both the Brahminical and non-Brahminical levels. Within the form the traditions of *Mārgī* and *Deśī,* of *Nāṭyadharmi* and Lokadharmī, play an equal role, though the *Deśī* and Lokadharmī flavours predominate. Finally, the form has connections with analogous levels in adjacent regions like Rajasthan and also those distant like the Yātrā of Bengal.

XIII

SVĀṄGA, KHYĀLA, NAUTANKĪ

In the chapter of Yātrā we have seen how a form of theatre which had its beginnings in the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa and in the devotional singing of the *Kīrtanas* transformed itself gradually into social drama revolving around historical themes with contemporary, social and political concerns. The format of the cycle-plays of Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā was transformed into a continuous narration of a single theme as a procession.

Somewhat later than the Rāsalīlā, Rāmalīlā, and Aṇkia-nāṭa or Bhāonā of the 16th and 17th centuries, evolved theatre forms (in most of Northern and Western India as also in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh) which were close parallels to the later Yātrā or Jātrā. Indeed, according to some scholars there is much overlap between the Svāṇga of Orissa and the Bengali inspired Yātrā of Orissa. All these were characterised by a social concern and departed radically from the eternal themes of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, even if the Purāṇas continued to provide the raw material for their thematic content. In U.P. it was called Nautankī; in U.P. and Rajasthan, the Khyāla; in Madhya Pradesh, Māca or Māñca; and in Haryana, U.P., Punjab and other places, Svāṅga. While each region had a distinct flavouring and the language varied from one linguistic unit to another, there was an underlying unity of purpose, a similarity of thematic content and a close affinity of dramatic structure and theatre techniques.

The origins of these theatre forms have been traced to the singing of the bards, the *caranas* and the *bhagatas*, the narrative recitation of the Kathakaras and the survivals of the Saṅgītaka and the Uparūpakas of the Sanskrit tradition. They have also been considered street theatre forms as much for their having shed almost all the ritualistic preliminaries of Rāsalīlā, Rāmalīlā and Bhagata as for the venue of their performance which is neither the temple nor the temple courtyard.

Historically, the forms cannot be traced to a date prior to late 18th or early 19th centuries as they seem to be contemporaneous with the emergence of British power and the development in different languages of Northern, Western and Eastern India. This history thus does not necessitate a flash-back to a distant literary or cultural past.

The word *svāṅga* is the counterpart of Chadma or Chau of Oriya, used in all the three Chau forms and also known to Assam. It also stand for disguise, camouflage and the like. The word was prevalent in Orissa, Bihar, U.P. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and even Kashmir. During the Holi festival Svāṅga parties dressed in motley

costumes are still known to most parts of North India. Besides, on the occasion of a marriage a humourous form of entertainment by the same name is enacted by the women of bride's party. It is probable that as opposed to the serious *nāṭaka or nāṭikā* and the farse *prahasana,* a potent form of Sanskrit drama may have been a forerunner of the Svāṅga. The forms are also not unrelated to the *līlā* and *rahasa* performances of the 17th-18th centuries.

Recently scholars such as J.C. Mathur, Dashrath Ojha and Rama Narayana Agrawala, who have done invaluable work in tracing the history of these forms, believe with some difference of opinion that the word Svāṅga is derived from the still existing word Saṅgīta which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit Saṅgītaka. Also according to them it has obvious links with the theatrical one-man show Bhagitya (derived from *bahurūpiya*) and the traditions of singing the *Kīrtanas sung* by Kirtaniyās mentioned in *the Āine-Akbari.* Ram Narayana Agrawala in a publication entitled *Saṅgīta* systematically traces the history of these forms, namely the Svāṅga, the Bhagata, the Khyāla and the Nautankī in U.P., Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana. It would appear from this detailed reconstruction that although the forms are seemingly young and recent, they have vital connections with artistic developments in India, which can be traced to the l5th or 16th century or perhaps earlier.

Be that as it may, the Svāṅga today is restricted to rural India though it is not uncommon in semi-urban and urban centres. In Punjab, the Jhānkī type of tableaux and the Svāṇga is still presented on special occasions by rival groups during the Holi celebrations. The characteristic feature of all these performances whether in Punjab or Haryana or Rajasthan or U.P. is the costuming and the wordy battle which takes place between two groups or between two characters. In Haryana it takes the form of a dialogue with a long question and answer session between two characters. In Rajasthan the Svāṇgas have a very wide range: Jhamatare, Tūntiyā and Tuntiki are presented on the occasion of a marriage; others are presented during Holi, etc. ; and yet others revolve round popular themes like the Dholā-Māru.

While the dialogue is sharp and the singing clear, the dramatic element is limited. There is little possibility of the operation of multiple levels of meaning or of the development of plot or character. The *nagārā* and the drums herald the performance when it is performed outdoors and not on domestic occasions. The stories range from the popular ballads to historical events. Social satire and sharp comment is woven into the dialogues and often there is the possibility of the single actor taking multiple roles.

The Khyāla of U. P. and today chiefly Rajasthan is a more developed form which has its roots as much in a social wit and humour as in a literary genre of the same name. Its origins have also been traced to *Rāsa, Carcharī, Phāgu* etc., which we have discussed in the context of the Rāsalīlā. These forms gave rise to the social drama forms called by various names such as Ramata, Khela, Khyāla, etc. By the 18th century Khyāla was as much a music composition as a poetic and dramatic composition and the centre of this new type of entertainment was understandably Agra. Gradually, while from this same source Nautankī developed in Uttar Pradesh, Khyāla became popular in Rajasthan. It will

be obvious from the above that the two forms are closely inter linked: a comparison of the two also shows many points of contact as also features of distinctiveness.

Today the Khyāla has a large variety of sub-schools and styles and is largely the preserve of a group of professional musicians and actors, some of whom belong to the class of *bhāḍas, gandharpas*, etc. and others to various categories of the Hindu castes. Many of the sub-schools or styles derive their names either from the region or the people or the form and technique of presentation.



There is thus the Mewari Khyāla, the Jaipuri Khyala, the Kucamani, the Shekhāwati Khyāla, the Hatharasi Khyāla, etc. There is also the Gandharpa Khyāla which derives its name from the special community. The Kathāvācaka Khyāla, the Abhinaya Khyāla, etc. suggest their relative emphasis on the word or movement. The Tura Kalagi Khyāla is called after the name of its authors, so also is the Alibaksh Khyāla. The Dangali Khyāla suggests by its very name the nature of the performance.

Each of the sub-schools and styles has also evolved its particular form of stage and basic decor. Indeed, the sub-schools and styles can be distinguished from each other as much through their content, language, dialect and musical technique as the shape, size and the nature of the stage.

The basic features of the stage however are common; and it is remotely reminiscent of principles of stage construction of the Sanskrit theatre. We must clarify that the Sanskrit theatre was performed in an elaborately well-planned indoor theatre, which demanded the adherence to certain rigorously designed conventions of space division. It is these principles and conventions of 'zonal arrangements' *(Kakṣavibhāga)* which have survived in the so-called folk forms of Indian theatre tradition. There is a platform usually three or four feet high: the four corners of the stage are adorned with trunks of banana trees, and there is a line of frills at a height of about 10 to 12 feet right around pillars. Immeditaely in front of the stage on one side white sheets are spread on the ground for special invitees. The audience is seated on three sides. Often at the back stage is an other balcony-like structure at a height of about 12 to 20 feet; these balconies serve multiple functions in the dramatic action and seem to be a development of multiple levels of the Sanskrit stage. A ladder is used for the characters' descent to the main stage below: often there may be more than two balconies. Strangely enough this is also reminiscent of the Elizabethan stage where balconies were popular. At a little distance from the 4-5 feet high main platform a pole is installed which announces the name of the company

or the akhārā. Lighting is provided by oil soaked torches tied to place as we had seen in the case of the Aṇkiā-nāṭa and Bhāonā performances. On the main stage itself there is a special place, where a chair or another type of seat is placed for the use of the director/producer of the performance called the *ustād*. It will be recalled that the trainer/director in the Purulia Chau is also called *ustād*. Sometimes instead of the plain white sheet in front of the main stage there is another low-levelled stage of smaller dimensions. This is called the *laghu* stage or little stage. Behind the balcony structure and main stage is the area of the greenroom and the rest.

We will have noticed thus that the Khyāla stage is well planned and gives scope for the presentation of a wide variety of theatrical situations. Three levels are clear, namely, the balcony, the main stage, and the little stage or the floor area on sheets at ground level.

The conventions of the *Kakṣavibhāga* of the Sanskrit stage can be and often are assiduously followed here, although this is not apparent at first sight.

The ceremony of the installation of the pole is performed nearly a month before the actual performance: today it marks only the reservation of a particular area for the performance and the beginning of the construction of the stage. Initially this installation of the pole may have had an agricultural function and also a ritualistic significance. We must also remember the significance of the installation of the pole in the context of the Chau forms and the *jarjara* mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The street, the theatre or the so-called secular forms of Indian theatre continue to adhere to the tradition, but obviously there is a dissociation from the original function or rite.

Many continuities of ancient traditions can be discerned, although the contemporary manifestations are remote in time. It is these survivals which lead us to conclude that the so-called 'folk-forms' and 'classical forms' should never be viewed as mutually exclusive categories. They are differentiated categories in a relationship of complimentariness rather than conflict or confrontation. The theorists and the codifiers from the days of Bharata were conscious of this continuum and they provided it with a framework which continues to have validity.

As in the case of all other dance-drama forms, the performance begins with the beating of drums, the playing of typically Rajasthani instruments and the singing of the musicians. The *nagārā*, *ḍholaka* and the cymbals (*mañjīrā*) and today the harmonium constitute the instruments. The characters appear on the stage and introduce themselves, although this time more through singing than a particular stance or a *dharaṇa*. However, as in the case of Yatra, often there is much introductory dancing which has vague similarities with the foot-work of Kathak and other North Indian dance forms. This portion is known as the "adayagi" and establishes the style of the particular character's acting. It also introduces the salient features of his character. This is the simpler counterpart of the *praveśa dāru* of Bhāgavatamelā.

An initial *Gaṇeśa vandanā* or a *Sarasvati vandanā* is not unknown but it is not obligatory. Like the Yātrā, the Khyāla also begins on a high melodramatic note and there is a great deal of horse-play and sarcasm on things sacrosanct. These conventions have also filtered through into the plays specially written on the Khyala pattern for the

Rajasthani marionettes. Unlike Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā and Aṅkiā-nāṭa, but like Bhāgavatamelā, Yakṣagāna and Kuṭiyaṭṭam, the role of a *Vidūṣaka* or a character who fulfils that function is vital. He comments on the conduct of the main character, provides the comic relief in moments of crisis and is instrumental in pricking the bubbles of hypocrisy and sham of society and of those in authority in the play. He has the fullest freedom for improvising and for entering any situation at any time. He is the distant cousin of the Viveka of the Yātrā.

The presentation of the drama is through the usual (and what we may by now call the standard format of Indian drama) prose passages, recited verse and sung passages and sections of pure dance. The metrical patterns are the dohā, *kavitā*, *seherā* and *soraṭhā*, to the near exclusion of the *caupāi* form so essential to the presentation of *Rāmāyaṇa* theatre of North India. Folk tunes of Rajasthan are used by some characters and in certain sections of the dialogue: other verses are set to *rāgas* of the Hindustani classical music like Sāraṅga, Kalyāṇa, Bhūpālī, Toḍi, Lalita, Bhairavī, etc. The *tālas* are as varied, and there are sequences where pure dance movements culminate in *tihāi* or triplets. Unlike the Southern forms, however, there is no close synchronisation between the word and the musical note and between the musical phrase and *abhinaya* (gesture). It is the absence of this characteristic which has been responsible for distinguishing classical drama from folk drama in many contexts or at least in making critics speak of an artistic grading or hiearchy amongst the various theatre forms.

The Khyāla, however, follows the conventions of the zonal division of the stage to a much greater degree than many of the other forms. Apart from the use of the balcony as the residence of the queens, etc., different areas of the stage are demarcated for suggesting different locales. The little stage or the front sheet covered area is also used similarly.

As in the case of Chau, Yakṣagāna, Bhāgavatamelā, Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yātrā and others, here also female roles are performed by veteran male actors, and the transformation of the male actor in a female role is as successful as artistically satisfying. Verbal and movement communication is of the highest order and not for a minute is the illusion broken.

The repertoire, as we have said before, is drawn from tales of myth and legend or historical tales as well as from contemporary events. While there are Khyālas like *"Rukmiṇī maṅgala, Hariścandra* and *Nala-Damayantī"*, historical plays like *Pṛthvīrāj Chauhān, Amar Singh Rathoḍ,* etc. are predominant. Romantic tales like *Lailā Majnu, Dholā-Māru, Pathān Shehzadi,* etc. are equally popular. There are some other Khyālas based on the lives of saints like Narasī Bhagata and others. It will be clear even from these few titles that while some theses form part of the Indian literary and theatrical tradition, others are distinctive to the region and belong to the oral traditions.

The Khyāla costuming and make-up techniques are naturalistic and simple. Period costumes are common and while wigs and coiffeur are of a special kind, there is no stylization. Also unlike the other forms, no masks are used nor is the face transformed through elaborate make-up.

Finally, there is the story of the several writers of the Khyālas from different regions

of Rajasthan and their output over the last one hundred and fifty years which constitutes a sizeable body of literature of the Khyāla. The Khyāla in many ways thus presents the same difficulty of classification into classical *(Mārgi)* or folk *(Deśī)*. Some features without doubt link it to the traditions of the Sanskrit theatre and the *saṅgitaka* in particular, others are later developments which have been assimilated into the older form. While it is comparatively young and breaks away from the religious aura, it maintains another type of continuity. It belongs to a macro-group of North India but has affinities with forms extant in East India, even if these similarities are not evident at first sight. It is almost a polarity of ail axis in a circle when compared to Rāmalīlā and "Rāsalīlā. The Maṅca or Māca of Madhya Pradesh is a close parallel of Rajasthan's Khyāla. It has been fostered by the *akharas* of Ujjain, Gwalior and other places. Many playwright-producers, such as Guru Gopālji, Bālamukund Guru, Kālurām Ustād, Rādhākṛṣṇa Guru, have written plays which range from mythology and history to contemporary social satire. The story of Raja Hariscandra is particularly popular; so also are the plays which revolve around historical characters life Raja Vikramājīt, etc.

The Maṅca stage roughly follows the same pattern as the Khyāla stage. There are both single and double level stages. The erection of stage-pole called the "Khamb thāpan" *(stambha sthāpanā)* is an important preliminary ritual. There is a special place for the vocalists called "Tek kī paṭ" and a consecrated place for the initiated persons called "baḍā ghant kā-paṭ".

As in other forms of the genre, there are essential preliminaries corresponding to the *pūrvaraṅga.* Soon after the invocation, a "bhīsti" (water carrier) arrives. He is accompanied or followed by the "farrāsa" (carpet spreader) and a "cobdār". The characters of the play arrive thereafter and are suitably introduced. A stylization in gaits, walking and other movements is evident.

The vocal accompaniment follows a systematic pattern of associating certain tunes called "raṅgats" with particular situations. These tunes are known by many names, such as Ger, Udapa, Choṭī raṅgat, Baḍī raṅgat, Laṅgḍī raṅgat, Jhūlā, etc. They are the counterparts of the several types of the *dhemālis* we had noticed in the context of the Aṅkiā-nāṭa. The ḍholak is all important and fulfills many functions. The Nautankī is a close parallel, another flowering of the same tree, as is the Maṅca or Māca form of Madhya Pradesh. The Nautankī also evolved out of the recitations of the *cāraṅas* (ballad singers), the reciters of the epic tales (Kathākāras) and the many forms of music, dance and drama traditions known to Northern India, particularly U.P. It is a distant descendant of the *saṅgitaka* of the Sanskrit tradition.

It is often performed on a raised platform of four or five feet height. Unlike the Khyāla stage, there are no multiple stages here such as the balcony or a lower little stage. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see a Nautankī performance in a village square or a crowded street where adjacent house-tops, balconies and windows of houses are naturally and conveniently employed to suggest different locales. The play begins with the entry of the musicians: they play an orchestra which comprises percussion and wind and stringed instruments. There is the *nagārā*, the kettle drum played with strings, the

ḍholak, the sāraṅgī, a clarinet and today the inevitable harmonium. An invocation is sung first: it is invariably in praise of a deity like Kṛṣṇa, Sarasvatī, Śiva, or the Guru. Many of the invocatory songs are common to the Rāsalīlā and Nautankī such as the famous ones on Guru Brahmā, Guru Viṣṇu, etc. This portion is known as the "e" and is followed by the entry of the Rānga, the stage manager/director, the counterpart of the *Sūtradhāra,* the Vyāsa, and the Svāmī. He sings out the theme of the drama to be performed and introduces the characters of the play. A song, called the "caubola", consisting of four lines, with a 28 beat pattern of each line follows. The conclusion of the "caubola " singing synchronises with the "daur", also a four-line rhymed verse, this time with 12 beats for the first three lines, and 28 for the last. The nagārā punctuates all this singing with its strokes and rhythmic patterns. The characters then enter the stage and begin to sing their parts. In the Yātrā we had noticed that the *juḍi* system was introduced in order to make the song heard by all sections of the audience. In the Nautankī another device is introduced. The character repeats his lines by singing them at four corners of the stage, so as to enable all sections of the public seated on three sides of the platform-stage to hear him. The melody in the Yātrā was passed on diagonally from one *juḍi* singer to the other; here the character himself moves from one corner to the other diagonally opposite. Synchronising with the melody or independently, he also presents a dance sequence according to the situation and mood of the character he is playing. As in the Khyāla, this provides for many interesting choreographical patterns and rhythmic variations. The actor has scope in these passages to show his skill and training as a dancer. The tempo of the melody is often accelerated, culminating in many interesting and effective patterns of doubling, quadrupling, etc.

While the sung verses are in the varied metres of Avadhī, Rajasthāni, Vrajabhāṣā and even Urdu poetry, such as the *dohā, soràha*, etc., there are many prose passages. Persianised Urdu and Khaḍībolī words of Hindi are used for these. The musical melodies range from "dhrupad" in the *maṅglācaraṇa* to *dādarā, lavaṇī, quawālī,* etc. in other sections. Some are common to Hindustani *rāgas* and others based on folk tunes of Uttar Pradesh. This is a pattern which we have already noticed in the Khyāla and other forms. The popular *rāgas* are Pīlū, Bilāwal, Bhairavī, and Khamāja.

The dramatic action of the story proceeds swiftly with melodrama, declamation, singing and dancing and once again without a vocabulary of stylized gestures or *aṇgikābhinaya.* The Munshiji or the clown plays the same role as his counterparts in the Khyāla, Yātrā, Yakśagāna, etc. He invariably acts in a special style. Unities of time and place are discarded as in the other forms and through all these media, myth, legend, historical tales and social drama are presented.

The repertoire of Nautankī is extensive and in the course of these years it has adapted many new literary creations. Like the Khyāla, the themes include the story of Hariscandra (a popular story for all theatre forms), *Indrasabhā* by Āgā Hasan Amānat, historical tales like Amarsingh Rāthoṛ, Pṛthvirāj Cauhān, Pannādevī, Durgādevī, Tipu Sultan, etc. Alongside are romantic tales like Siyāh Poś and Nautankī (from which the name is derived and which revolves around the love story of Bhup Singh, a commoner, and the

princess Nautankī; of course, other interpretations for the origin of the form have been offered); mythological plays like *Śhrawan Kumār, Nal*a *Damayantī, Rāma Vanavāsa,* and pure social dramas like *Sultāna Dāku, Reśmi Rumāl, Shāhī Lakaīahārā, Triy*ā *Caritra,* etc.

The actors of the Nautankī belong to institutions known as the *akhārās* where actors are trained in singing, acting, dancing and even wrestling. The part of women are played by men as in the other drama forms. In some Nautankī sub-schools professional women singers are also known to have taken part. As in the case of Khyālā, etc. many sub-schools and variants have appeared over the course of decades. There are the Hathras and Kanpur schools; the former has a stronger base in singing of classical music, the latter stresses dialogue and high drama. There are others in Kanauj, Muzzafarnagar, etc. Drawn from different sections of society, the actors do not belong to a particular caste: they are all professionals who are not as highly paid as the Yātrā actors but earn enough.

The Nautankī has faced many vicissitudes and has actors who have been great artists and others who are even cheap and vulgar. The vigour and vitality of the form have attracted many modern playwrights and drama directors like Habib Tanvir, etc., who have adopted even the Sanskrit plays like *Mṛccha-Kaṭika (Matti Ki Gāḍi)* — for presentation in a Nautankī form. Its chances of survival and growth will depend on the modern director's ability to use it as a powerful medium for social drama and on the traditional artist's ability to change and develop it without shedding or diluting the stylistic features of the form.

Habib Tanvir has also adopted the Chattisgarhi rural drama Māca for presentation in a modern, sophisticated form. The range and skills of his actors have proved beyond doubt that in the hands of a sensitive director the rural and semi-urban theatre can provide a base for a modern and truly Indian theatre rooted to the soil. Indeed, the contemporary theatre activity in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other city centres of the country has shown the fascination of the modern artist for these forms. Through the old form contemporary content and concerns have been voiced, and even if we accept that all these forms are only folk and rural, we see how this so-called 'little tradition' of the semi-literate and illiterate is influencing the literate and urban sophisticated. These forms are the survivals of age-old traditions, and had in the last two hundred years been restricted to rural and semi-urban milieus without much patronage and encouragement, until they had been artistically transformed into street theatre. This new awareness must however be nurtured delicately and carefully for the journey is not without its dangers of over enthusiasm.

It is also worthwhile to remember that the theatre of the epics and the Purāṇas, i.e., the Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā and the Aṅkiā-nāṭa, is not a totally different genre from this other theatre which emphasizes the here and now, and the mundane social concerns of which have earned it the appellation of secular theatre as opposed to religious or ritual theatre. Also the Svaṅga or Saṅga, Khyāla, Maṅch, Nautankī, etc., alongwith their immediate predecessors like the Bhagatas and the Kīrtanas, are all closely interconnected and even if the lines of mobility are not clearly discernible, they belong to one macro-group. All of them in turn are related to the Yātrā of the East and the Bhavāi or Tamāsa of the West.

Thus both historically and geographically, they are not isolated creations of small minority groups of itinerant performers.

Since much has been written on their content and stylistic features, we have not considered it necessary to go into these technical aspects. Our objective has been to place them in a historical perspective and to identify their links with other forms.

We find thus that although the forms are young, they carry forward traditions which can be traced to the 18th century in some cases and even earlier in others. They have close affinities with the growth of many Indian languages between the 13th and 18th centuries but particularly with those which developed between the 16th and 18th centuries.

Their content is markedly different and the emphasis on historical, social and romantic tales gives them a capacity for containing contemporaneity without the aid of allegory and metaphor. Unlike the mythological plays which invariably move on multiple planes, here a double level or even a unidimensional quality can be discerned.

All have a similar format, with some distinctiveness. All of them follow the principles of the later Sanskrit drama or the Saṅgitaka and from this point of view one may well agree with Rām Narāyana Agrawāla who calls them by the generic term of Saṅgita. The technical peculiarities of the forms are determined by the socio-cultural milieu in which these forms flourished and the strata of society for which they were performed.

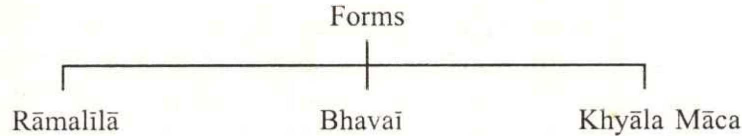
While thus, they are Lokadharmī in one sense, they also have many Nāṭyadharmī stylistic features of suggestion, of evocation, rather than a realistic portrayal through realistic decor, props and the rest. The development of the languages and the related theatre forms can be seen as branches of the same tree.

Historically speaking, the growth of these forms and the contemporary developments could perhaps be reduced to a chart which will graphically present the main currents and points of contact among them.

Sanskṛat				
Prākṛat/Aparbhraṁśa				
East Magadhī	—	—	Sauraśeni	—
Assamese	Bengali	Oriya	Gujaratī	Vrajabhāṣā
Vrajabolī	Kīrtana	Svāṅg	Rāsaka	Rāso
Bhāonā		Kīrtana	Garabī	Rāsa
Aṅkiā-nāṭa			Bhavāi	Rāsa
Kīrtaniyā				Ramata
				Rāmalīlā
				Rāsalīlā
				Khyāla
				Svāṅga
				Nautanki

As in the case of the South, we have here also different levels of performance with varied emphasis on the spoken word, sung word, the cyclic presentation or the straight narrative theatre. We may look at it thus.

1	Kathākāra	Mono-acting
2	Bhagata	Bahurūpiyā
3	Kīrtaniyā	Kīrtana-collective singing
4	Vacanakār	
5	Rāsa	Rāsaka Saṅgītaka Rāsalīlā
6	Historical drama	Svāṅga, Nautankī



The levels and genres of dance and dance-drama performance are:

	Bihar Bengal	Orissa	Gujarat	Assam	Rajasthan & U.P.
Tribal	Sānthālas Hos, etc.	Juāṅgs Saorās	Kaṇbīs Abhīras Sarayātas	Bodos etc.	Sansīs etc. Dhobīs, etc.
Rural communities and narrative forms	Kathākāras	Kathākāra	Cāraṇa	Cāraṇa	Kathākār
Cycle plays	Rāmalīlā	Rāmalīlā	Rāsaka	Bhāonā	Rāmalīlā Rāsalīlā
Procession	Yātrā	Yātrā	Rāso Rāsaka	Aṅkiā-nāṭa	Saṅgīta Svāṅg Nautankī
Semi-urban Theatre			Phāgu Bhavāi		Khyāla Bhavāi Māca
Dance forms	Puruliā Chau Seraikalā Chau	Mayur-bhanj Chau	Garabā Beḍā-nṛtya	Sattrā dancing Ojā-palli	Nṛtya Nācani
Temple and temple courtyard forms		Goṭipuas	Bhavāi of the temple	Deodhani	Vraj-Rāsa Kathak
Puppet forms	Putul-Khelā	Rāvaṇa Chāyā	—	Putul-nāc	Kaṭhaputalī

XIV

TAMĀŚĀ

The history of the Tamāśā of Maharashtra presents a picture which is somewhat different from the forms we have so far studied although it is another facet of the total Indian mosaic of artistic traditions in different parts. Unlike the Rāmalīlā, Rāsalīlā and Aṅkiā-nāṭa and although the links with the early history of Marathi literature are unmistakable, its origins cannot be traced to the writings of the saint poets Jnanesvara, Rāmadāsa, Namadeva or to the narrative secular writing of Eknatha or Sridhara. The internal evidence of this poetry and narrative writing tells us of the existence of many dance and music styles: the preoccupation of the medieval Marathi writer with the themes of the *Ramāyaṅa* and the *Mahābhārata* is obvious but there is no direct bearing of early and medieval writing on the form of theatre called Tamāsa which came into being in Maharashtra in the 18th century. Instead, for its roots and its seeds one would have to look at the contemporary medieval traditions of Kīrtaniya, the Pauraṇika of the oral tradition and the variety of musical forms which were known to Maharashtra. Also, it would be necessary to take into account the political history of Maharashtra in the 18th century. The affinities between the Marāthi theatre of the early 19th century and some elements of Tamāsā and forms prevalent in Tanjore and Andhra can be explained to some extent by the rise of the Maratha Kingdom and the consequential cultural interactions which must have taken place. In view of these distinguishing features, it is not necessary to have a bird's-eye view of the growth of the Marathi language from the 11th century onwards or delineate the paths of the development of Marathi literature in many centuries preceding the emergence of Tamāśā as a distinct genre in the second half of the 18th century.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that many styles of singing and writing were known to Maharashtra. In this region, as in others, there were the parallel streams of the writing in the Sanskrit and creativity in Marathi. Ram Joshi (A.D. 1762-1812), the originator of the Tamāśā, was familiar with the Sanskrit Purāṇas and the recitation and singing of the Kīrtaniyās as with the popular forms of theatre common all over the countryside. His association later with the gigantic personality of Moropant, an outstanding name in contemporary Marathi writing, led to a transformation which resulted in the metrical form of the Lāvaṇi singing being used to popularize the Aryas of Moropant.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Ram Joshi to use the existing singing styles for moral and didactic purpose, there continued to flourish a form of popular entertainment which was encouraged and fostered in the courts of Bajirao II (late 18^{th} century). The ruler has been compared to Wajid Ali Shah who lost his kingdom on account of over indulgence in the arts. The singers and dancers of his court included people from all sections of society but in course of time this became the special preserve of the Mahārs and Maṅgs, again two outcaste communities like the Bhavāyās of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Today also, the Tamāśā groups mainly comprise the Mahārs and the Maṅgs, although many Brahmins like Patthe Bapu Rao and in more recent years others like P.L. Deshpande, Vasant Bapat and Vijay Tendulkar have written Tamāśās and have been attracted to the form, and many Brahmins have taken part in it.

The predecessor of the Tamāśā may well have been, according to scholars like Ganesh Ranganath Dandavate, the Goṅdhal, a type of religious discourse, and the Lāvaṇi, a metrical composition which was used for the best part for singing and was a popular entertainment where a question and answer dialogue was characteristic.

The tradition of the "goṅdhaḷ" or "goṅdhak" is old and can be perhaps traced back to Purāṇic sources. It is probably derived from the word *Gaṇa-dala* or equivalent of *bhakta-gaṇa* (a group of devotees). The form of recitation or devotional singing was associated chiefly with the worship of Śiva and Gaṇeśa, and later with Śakti pūjā. The Śaivite cults and the Śakti worship were strong in Maharashtra for many centuries and this is akin to the worship of Ambā which we had noticed in the context of Bhavāi. The performance presented before the Ambā devī shrine came to be known as Goṅdhaḷ and we find references to it in the poetry of Nāmadeva and others. Two types of goṅdhaḷ were apparently popular: one which was congregational devotional singing and the other where a Purāṇic episode was presented dramatically. The goṅdhaḷ party comprised four members: one, the chief singer and reciter; a second, who was a foil to the main singer or nāyaka; a third, the player of the musical instrument called the "tuntune"; and a fourth, the player of another instrument called the "saṁbala." While the performance was largely operatic, dramatic elements were infused into it through the dialogue of the two vocalists. This form of singing and ritual performance was perhaps known to Jnānadeva and others who refer to the singing and enactment of the goṅdhaḷs. The antiquity of the goṅdhaḷ can also be established from other literary and historical references to the ritual and the performance. The goṅdhaḷ's singers were obviously the counterparts of the cāraṇas and the *bhāṭas* and the paurāṇikas, who too recited and sang epic tales and mythological stories.

Alongside was the development of the lāvaṇi. It was the successor of the *Campu* and Cūrṇikā forms we have noticed in the context of Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā. In course of time it became only a singing form which was common to Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and portions of Uttar Pradesh, although the traditions seems to have disappeared in many of these regions.

The gaṅdhal and the lāvaṇī, though belonging to different milieus—one ritualistic and religious, and the other secular and romantic—both shared the characteristic feature

of the dialogue form. The question-answer form in singing to the accompaniment of musical—the tuntune, ḍholaka, daph, cymbals, *Manjīrās*—could take many shapes and form in the lāvaṇī. The "Kalagi turar" could be a dialogue between Śiva and Śakti or between the followers of different cults. Other types of lāvaṇī were based on purely mundane themes and could be dialogues between two historical characters or the hero and heroine of a romantic tale. The metrical form of the lāvaṇīs was used by poets of all regions, Gujarati, Rajasthani and Hindi.

While we may not dwell further on the important role of the lāvaṇī in the poetic compositions of the literatures of all these regions, it is important to remember that although Maharashtra fostered this form, it is by no means restricted to Marathi literature.

Besides, there were two other forms which should be mentioned in the context of the Tamāśā. One was the ballad singing tradition of the Pavāḍā and the other was the theatrical form known as the Daśāvatāra which was common to Maharashtra and Karnataka and which survives today in Goa and the Konkan region. Finally, there was another form which was anterior to these last two, and this was the *gavalaṇa*. It was used extensively by the saint-poets of Marathi, particularly the Vaiṣṇavites. This was the counterpart of the līlās of Mathura and Vrundavan and revolved around the sport of the gopīs and Kṛṣṇa. The aspects of Dāṇalīlā and Mānalīlā were emphasized, but all was in a mood of devotion and *Bhakti*.

The Tamāśā, a purely earthy dance-drama form, which for its occasional obscenity and vulgarity was for at least a century or more looked down upon, is nevertheless related to those several flowerings of the rich Marathi literature, singing and theatre forms. Its social status, whether of the Mahāras and the Maṅgs or the court milieu of a decadent king or its employment as popular entertainment of soldiers, facilitated its downward mobility. However, with the slightest touch of a sensitive creative genius it had the potential of high drama with all the structural elements which could contain any theme or content.

Also, it must be recalled that although Ram Joshi may have been the first writer of the Tamāśā to be followed by Anantphandi who introduced the famous Phaṭakā (whip metre), the Tamāśā was perhaps known to other parts of India and Maharashtra for many centuries. Kabir and other poets of the 16th and 17th centuries refer to it and there are other literary and historical evidences to support this view. It is against this background that we may see the performance of the Tamāśā which, though young, is a distinct genre, having vital links with an older past and is the amalgam of many diverse forms prevalent in preceding centuries. The 18th century writers and theatre-directors of the Tamāśā apparently resurrected a form popular and familiar, but one which continued to be boisterous, earthy and secular to the core.

The performance of the Tamāśā (a word derived from Persian) can be held anywhere, in the village square, the courtyard of a house, an open field or on a proscenium stage. Today eighty odd companies are in existence with nearly three thousand players and actors. The play is performed in both rural and urban milieus by special groups of people of the village, by the Mahāras or Maṅgs or other professional artists. It is performed in

villages, small towns, big cities, anywhere. In Pune and Bombay shows are held regularly. These draw vast audiences like the Yātrā of Bengal. The actors are popular and often affluent. The acting area is an enclosure in a village courtyard on a low or raised platform. It can also be a proscenium stage in a modern theatre hall. It is not known whether any preliminary ritual is held in the greenroom; most likely the tradition of worshipping the Ambā Devī has been dispensed with, in recent times, by some groups but is practiced by others.

The performance begins with the entry of the musicians as in other dance-drama forms. First, two percussionist enter—the Ḍholakīwālā and the Halgīwālā. The Ḍholakīwālā plays on the ḍholak which is peculiar to Maharashtra and is a cross between a Maḍalam of the South and the pakhāvaj of the North. The Halgīwālā plays a large *daph*, a tambourine type of instrument which is often seen in many miniature paintings. While the ḍholak provides the basic rhythm and the usual metrical cycles (*tālas*) are played on it, the halgī provides the sharp accents and other piercing sounds. The two play synchronized and asynchronized rhythmic patterns almost as if counter-pointing. The playing of the ḍholak and the halgī serves the same purpose as the "cenda" and "maḍalam" prelude in Kathākali and Yakṣagāna. The beginning of the recital is announced far and wide by them. Two more instrumentalists soon join the cymbal player (the maṅjīrāwālā) and the *tuntune* player. The tuntune or tun-tuningā is akin to the *ektārā* of other regions of India, with the important difference that the latter's base is wooden and the single stringed instrument is played through plucking with a long nail of the index finger or an iron triangle. The singer enters last and takes his position in front of the group. The instrumentalists, i.e. the *manjīrā* player and the tuntune player, are also singers who join in the refrain in high pitched voices. There is also the "surtya", the provider of the drone or the tonic who often joins in the singing.

After the drumming is over and the main musician has entered and taken his position in the group, an invocation to Gaṇeśa is sung. The entire group of musicians move forward and backward with their backs to the audience. Sometimes the invocation is to Śiva and Pārvatī. This singing is known as the gāna and the whole invocatory composition is called the āvāhana. In the context of Bhavāi we had noticed that the first entries were known as the āvaṇis. However, the āvāhana and the gāna of Tamāśā are not the counterparts of the *praveśa dārus* of Bhāgavatamelā forms or the dharaṇas of the Chau forms where they serve the purpose of introducing the character. The style of gāna singing has strong affinities with the goṅdhal type of musical composition we have mentioned earlier. The dialogue form was common to the goṅdhal and lāvaṇī and here the principal singer and his supporters carry on this dialogue in the invocatory passages. This provides the occasion to incorporate the Kalagi tura type of question and answer where the relative merits of Śiva and Śakti can be delineated upon. This form of dialogue singing was pervasive in the 14th-15th centuries and Sufi literature also provides evidence of its existence. During the gāna singing by the principal singer who acts as *Sūtradhāra* and director of the performance throughout, another important character of Tamāśā, the "Soṅgāḍya" or the *Vidūṣaka* (or clown), enters the stage and joins the singing.

The gāna is followed by the "gavalaṇa" or the "gaulaṇi". As has been pointed out earlier, the gavalaṇa or the gaulaṇI was the Marathi counterpart of the Kṛṣṇalīlā in Marathi religious literature, where different episodes of the life of Kṛṣṇa were described, sung and perhaps enacted. In the Tamāśā the same tradition continues but is completely transformed. The mood of devotion is replaced by an atmosphere of everyday love, teasing, tantalizing and the rest. The gaulaṇa (literally meaning milk-maid) enters the stage: this time it is not a male actor in female attire as in most other forms, but the *naṭī* or the female heroine of the drama. She begins a dialogue with the *Sūtradhāra* or the principal singer with the end of her sāri across her head and held by two outstretched arms. This provides a moment of suspense and excitement to the audience which is all too eager to see the face of the actress. She enters with her back to the audience and moves around the stage in rhythmic steps, surrounded all the time by the musicians who follow her. The Soṅgāḍya or the *Vidūṣaka* feigns the part of Kṛṣṇa and there are sharp exchanges between the gavalaṇa and the soṅgāḍya. The mañjīrā player, the tuntune player, all join in the conversation and there is scope here for both pure dance (*nṛtta*) by the gavalaṇa and witty erotic dialogue amongst them all. The theme of the Dāṇalīlā where Kṛṣṇa demands his toll from the milk-maidens is presented in a manner of eveteasing, tom-foolery and even some sarcasm. The power of the theatre medium to deal with high religious themes in everyday mundane manner is perhaps unique to India and some parts of Asia for the gods themselves are not creatures meant to be worshipped as deities of another world. They are also playthings of the world, of sense and colour, full of fun and frolic, humour and wit, like ordinary human beings. Scholars have commented at length on this secularisation of the theme and have even passed judgements on the degeneration the particular episode of the gavalaṇa represents, but it must be remembered that in the Indian context the religious, the devotional and the secular are not in counter-opposition, representing a battle of the flesh and spirit, but are instead different layers of the same reality, complementary to each other. This attitude, even within the framework of the down to earth Tamāśā presentation, is amply borne out by the fact that the end of the dance and this witty exchange amongst the *Sūtradhāra*, the gavalaṇa or naṭī, the musicians, soṅgāḍya and his assistant the pāinḍiā (who is usually presented as a deformed club-footed character) are instantly followed by a highly serious and sombre discussion through a question-answer type of lāvaṇī singing. The note of humour is replaced by a philosophic tone where moral issues are discussed and eternal problems posed. As in the gāna, here also the lāvaṇī incorporates discussion between Śiva and Śakti and other symbols of moral traits or binary non-opposites of Indian thought and mythology. The influence of the earlier type of dialogue of the Kalagi tura is evident and unmistakable. Interestingly enough the section is also called Jhagḍā or the sawal-jabab type of lāvaṇī. The jhagḍā and the question and answer type of the lāvaṇīs relate, however, only to philosophic issues or characteristics of divine forces and symbols and not to human beings. This is indeed a most ingenious way of bringing home a moral message without taxing the patience of the audience.

The mood of the serious lāvaṇīs changes soon and the third and final preliminary is

now presented. This time is straight farce called the Raṇga Bājī where the theme is a social situation. It may be the love of a village maiden with a merchant, the entry of three robbers into a woman's house or any other similar theme. These three preliminary sections where the invocation, the spiritual and the mundane come together, may be compared to the preliminary invocation to Gaṇeśa and the other skits in Bhavāi. In both, the drumming, singing and the skits prepare the audience for watching a serious drama. We may also recall the entry of the Kāji-Pāji in the Çhau forms in this context.

The Vag is the play proper which can revolve around mythological or legendary stories, historical romances and themes of social injustice, etc. We have thus a large repertoire ranging from Purāṇic themes to Sant Tukāram, Jhānsī Kī Ranī, Dāmāji, Chail Batāu, etc. The last two are common to Bhavāi and Tamāśā.

The play (Vag) is presented through prose dialogue which is more often than not improvised and the actors have great freedom to improvise. The narrative sections are sung by the *Sūtradhāra* sardār and serve as interlinking passages; the lāvaṇīs are sung by the musicians.

The principal singer introduces the character by the first lāvaṇī and gives in a gist the main plot of the story. The musicians at the back provide the refrain or often a comment on the character pointing out his foibles; this provides scope for sharp sarcasm on the genteel world. The actors speak their parts through prose passages and the next lāvaṇī takes the story further and the two are interspersed with the dance of the heroine or other women characters. Loud sounds of ji-ji-ji, a feature of the "Pavāḍa," and of reinforcing a point through ejaculations of hai-hai-hai, resound throughout the Vag. The prose passages are equivalent to the *vacana* traditions of the Southern forms and the lāvaṇīs are distant cousins of the *campu* and the *cūrṇaka*. The structure of the play and the theatrical technique are similar to all that we have observed in the context of other forms. There is a free movement from one time situation to another, from one locale to the other, and the entire content is presented through an amalgam of the spoken word, the recited verse, the sung poem, drumming, gesticulation, dance and stylized movement.

While the male actors and the *Sūtradhāra* called "sardār", and often the musicians also, walk on the stage in stylized gaits and synchronize their movements to rhythmic patterns of the drum, the dance content is minimal. It is the female actress who is the chief exponent of dance movement in the play. She performs this both in the preliminary sections as also as part of her role in the Vag proper. Her stance is erect and the sturdy Mahāra and the Kolhaṭi women make energetic dancers of the Tamāśā groups. The rhythmic vocabulary of these dances is considerable. Instead of producing sounds like the Kathak dancer through stamping the full foot, they emphasize toeheel movements. The rhythmic patterns are varied and like the Bhavāi or the Nātua dancer of Northern India they can weave many permutations and combinations on the basic metrical cycle. Sometimes a sharp heel contact provides the pauses or the first beat (*sama*) accentuations. While the foot-work is impressive and there is a system of *bols* and mnemomics as in the Bhavāi, there are fewer spins or pirouettes. Circles are broken up into several smaller steps and foot-contacts. The rhythmic passages conclude as in other dance forms in

triplets of the final phrase. The dancing of Bhavāi, the Nātua and the chiseled Kathak and even portions of Rāsalīlā have a vague family resemblance but each can be clearly distinguished from one another. The erect posture, the use of the ankle bells, the emphasis on the rhythmic foot-work to the exclusion of the use of other parts of the body, are all common features; but the use of the hip, the absence or presence of the set pattern of movements of the arms and the extent and degree of the word-sound-gesture relationship make each of these forms distinct and give each a unique individuality.

Apart from the dance sequences, movement enters into the Tamāśā through considerable acrobatic play which is executed by the nātucni (female actress), soṅgāḍya and other characters. In this respect the Tamāśā is a close second to the Bhavāi. Also some of the acrobatic movements have close affinities with the several circle folk dances known to Maharashtra.

The musical compositions of the Tamāśā manifest the typical phenomenon of a simultaneous use of the *Rāga* system and the incorporation of many folk and indigenous melodies. Amongst the Hindustani *ragas* Yaman, Bhairavī, Pīlu are common; there are many others.

All this rich fare of elementary ritual, farce, satire, sarcasm, dance and music concludes with something which is akin to an *āratī.* In any case the finale is always on a high moral note that the good wins, evil perishes, truth is victorious and falsehood is self-destructive.

The costumes of the Tamāśā players who are called by various names such as the gammat, phaḍa etc. (each deriving its name from a class of performance or style of singing), are not period costumes as in other forms. For the most part they are every day dress of the different sections of the Maharashtra society. The musicians and many other characters all wear dhotis below and kurtās or long tunics and waist coats above. A red sash round the waist called *śelā* is common and the turban or *pheṭā* is a must. The variety of pheṭās is large and often it is the manner of pheṭā or the dhorti which gives a clue to the social status of the character. The women actors also perform all roles in the ordinary eight-or nine-yard sārī draped in the Maharashtra style. Make-up is ordinary and no mask or stylized drawing of lines is in vogue.

Thus, in spite of its lowly beginnings, its social status and its marked emphasis on social drama and mundane theme, the Tamāśā exhibits many of the features of Sanskrit drama and its offshoots of the Uparūpakas and the Saṅgītaka. There are the ritualistic beginning, however elementary, the character of the *Sūtradhāra* of Sardār, the *Vidūṣaka* or the Soṇgadya, the leading actress, the *naṭīs* or the nātucni, the use of alternating prose and poetic passages, the intermingling of the music and the dance. The over-all tone of the performance is, however, provided by the content and the language which is markedly *Deśī:* the spectacle is presented in a Lokadharmī style as opposed to a restrained discipline of the *Mārgī* and the Nāṭyadharmī. The absence of props and décor and use of suggestive gestures, however, belong to the sphere of Nāṭyadharmī rather than Lokadharmī. All this clearly leads to the conclusion that the two streams of *Mārgī* and *Deśī* and the styles of presentation as *Nāṭyadharmī* and Lokadharmī have to be studied

in a framework of complementaries and not of mutual exclusion. The addition or substraction of any given element or a group of elements could elevate or degrade the form in artistic terms, but the central core and the basic structure were common. All variations also belonged to a vast common river of the Indian theatre which could break out into many tributaries.

The rise of modern Marathi theatre as distinct from the continuation of the Tamāśā tradition has been attributed to Viṣṇu Bhave in 1843 and his talented successor Aṇṇā Sāheb Kirloskar. A close scrutiny of the artistic features of the plays of these pioneers which made music integral to the performance and the structure of the Tamāśā will reveal that while there appeared to be a qualitative change, it was a matter of the degree of sophistication rather than a total break and the evolution of an absolutely new form. They continued to follow the conventions of the *Sūtradhāra, Vidūṣaka,* the invocation of the Gaṇapati, etc., and the zonal divisions. They gave the theatre a new turn as much by the incorporation of classical *ragas* for the singing of all parts as by adopting the themes of Sanskrit theatre like *Śākuntalam, Mṛchakaṭikam,* etc. In short, content determined the nature of their performance and the chiseling of the conventions in folk forms like the Tamāśā gave a new dimension to the theatre. And yet these were not polarities, they lived and continued in simultaneity all through the 19th century as segments of a circle: the new developments were not thus movements of a revolt which obliterated earlier genres as progressions in linear time.

The theatre-artist of the late 19th century may have adopted these conventions subconsciously. On the conscious level, his was an attempt at reviving an older tradition or rejuvenating what he considered a decadent tradition. Today an analogous but somewhat different phenomenon has been in evidence during the last two or three decades. The contemporary playwright has, with self-conscious choice, adopted the form because neither the Saṅgīta nāṭaka of the 19th century nor the model of academic Western, particularly English, theatre of the same period could contain his concerns and aspirations. Perhaps the utilization of traditional theatre forms of Asian countries by playwrights in the West may also have had some part to play in his psychological make-up. But the result of all these factors (including a new interest of the educated Indian in oral, tribal and folk art traditions) has been an overwhelming popularity of the Tamāśā form in modern Marathi and other Indian language theatre. Venkatesh Madgulkar and P.L. Deshpande have used it powerfully. Vijaya Mehta has presented a Marathi version of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* of Brecht. Others in Ahmedabad, Delhi, etc. are also experimenting with the form. Thus the rhythm of cyclic time continues and each such movement is only another bead in the garland of Indian theatre arts which have a flexibility and a resilience all their own, where mobility and interpenetration of levels and mutual interaction of regions are ever possible without destruction of the regional identity or the personality of particular genre at specific levels.

XV

CONCLUSION

We had begun our journey from Kerala, with a description of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, a form which represents both the end of an epoch of Sanskrit drama and the beginning of theatre in regional languages. We travelled through Karnataka, Andhra and Tamil Nadu and saw how the Yakṣagāna and Bhāgavatamelā forms were a true amalgam of the continuation of some aspects of the Sanskrit stage and the emergence of new movements which were indigenous to the respective specific areas. We also underpinned the paths of mobility and the processes of interaction amongst these forms. We travelled to the east and came across a macro-group of Chau forms which though not precisely datable were fascinating specimens of a genre of theatre. Each is distinct and unique, but enmeshed with the other, with some overlaps and many autonomous traits. We started once again from the east and had a glimpse of the evolution of the Aṅkiā-nāṭa or the Bhāonā of Assam with its vital links with the rise of the Vaiṣṇavism in all parts of India. Travelling inward into central and northern India we looked at the multifaceted artistic expressions of the Rāma and Kṛṣṇa themes in the Rāmalīlā and Rāsalīlā forms. A parallel stream of the theatre of the procession leading to the theatre of the street was in evidence in the Yātrā of Orissa, Bengal and Manipur (the last could not be dealt with), and finally we concluded our journey in the central and western zone where the Purāṇic themes and the epic theatre had acquired a mundane garb in the forms called Saṅgīta, Svāṅga, Khyāla, Nautankī, Bhavāi and the youngest amongst these all, the Tamāśā. This circumambulation (*Parikramā*) of the Indian sub-continent was as spatial as temporal for the forms represented different moments of time, roughly the period from A.D. 1000 to the early 19th century. Contemporary survivals, renewals, rejuvenations and occasional transformation along with their validity in time, here and now of the 20th century, was pointed out. Unfortunately, two important forms of the North—namely, the Kariyāl of Himachal Pradesh and Bhāṇd Jaśan of Kashmir—could not be included.

The emphasis in the narrative was to establish the links of these forms with the growth of regional languages and to draw attention to the fact that although the Unity provided by the Sanskrit language and its theatre seemed to have disappeared on the surface and was apparently replaced by a multiplicity of languages, artistic genres and staggering variety of forms and techniques, there was and is an underlying unity which is discernible if the different components of the content, form and technique of these

theatre forms are closely analysed. This, it is hoped, may have been clear from the history, social background, and the artistic conventions of these multiple traditions. They indeed are the many arms of the one God, Naṭarāja or Durgā, eternal, abstract and beyond form on one level, and ever changing, renewing and specifically concrete on another. The two are set in a framework of complementariness, of overlayering and not of continued tension, conflict and obliteration of one form by another in sequential, linear time.

Also perhaps it is necessary to repeat that all these forms are suggestive of an intermediary stage between what can be identified as the arts of tribal and rural India (and those which are purely participative activities) and those others which demand high individual skill and which manifest themselves in the varied traditions of Hindustani or Karnatic music and the five of six different styles of dance, all termed together as "classical." The latter demand a separate initiated audience. In the introduction we had spoken of the present group as "mobile theatre" and indeed, whether literally in some cases and metaphorically in almost all cases (with the exception perhaps of Kuṭiyaṭṭam), these forms are the vehicles of upward or downward mobility in both sociological and artistic terms and of an intra-regional communication which often cuts across political and administrative units, or geographical boundaries, and social stratification.

It thus now remains for us only to place our individual descriptions of these forms in a chronological order of historical development, to the extent possible, and to briefly recapitulate the history and reconstruct the design of the basic foundation which, though not visible at first sight, governs the formal structure of the forms. In doing so, the many points of contact and the movements of autonomous growth will, it is hoped, be evident. To the framework of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence and the basic world-view, we have already referred.

The history of Sanskrit drama is well known. Scholars have commented upon it extensively. Fortunately, it is no longer necessary to dwell upon the incorrectness of the view that this dramatic tradition was only literary (a view held by some 19th and early 20th century foreign and Indian scholars). There is, instead, agreement on the fact that Sanskrit drama formed part of a highly evolved theatrical tradition governed by principles and laws which had little or nothing to do with the principles of Greek drama, or for that matter, western academic drama until the 19th century. The essence of this tradition lay in its purposive denial of a worldview where 'internal conflict' of the individual character was central to the dramatic action. Instead, life was broken up into its archetypal colours, where forces of good and evil were certainly in combat and confrontation but they were never contained within the body of an individual who was vacillating between "to be or not to be" in the case of a Hamlet, or between "moral good and individual happiness" in the case of an Oedipus, or between the life of the spirit and the life of the flesh of Christian drama. Human beings were archetypes or symbols and each moved according to his *svadharma,* along a path of action, which was his destiny to follow, and in doing so he loved, hated, fought, laughed, was disgusted, angry and compassionate, sequentially, until he reached a tranquility of mind and peace. In

academic terms, this abstraction of life into phases—into aspects of a rainbow of different colours, each colour being only a part of a single luminosity—gave rise to the theory of *rasa* which, though universally applicable to Indian artistic traditions, was evolved specifically in the context of "theatre."

The form and structure of the theatre developed to contain this basic world-view, which was essentially different from the usual form and movement of the Greek theatre with a slow beginning, followed by a high climax and final dénouement. Here in India this "theatre" movement flowed along a horizontal line or a circular path with links and joints. The theoretician formulated the concept of the *sandhis* (literally, joining together) to explain this vital structural feature of Sanskrit theatre. The plot developed like the architectural plan of a temple with a *mukha* (an opening), a *pratimukha* (akin to the *ardhamaṇḍapa* of a temple—i.e., progression), a *garbha* (literally, the womb, analogous to the inner sanctum of a temple), *vimarṣa* (a pause, a silence) and finally, a conclusion called the *nirvāhaṇa.* Within the plot, there could be dual or multiple levels of operation and concentric circles, each complementing or reinforcing the other but not intersecting each other. Sub-plots were like the subsidiary shrines within the periphery of the temple.

Alongside was the tremendous power of the Sanskrit language for multiple meaning and its capacity for communicating on different levels through the same word. This was an inherent linguistic trait and not one which has been acquired or instilled into a language through the genius of particular poets and writers. No doubt, double meaning and punning have been known to all languages and have been successfully and evocatively used by creative writers throughout the world. But the Sanskrit language had an overwhelming capacity for multiplicity of interpretation which it used as an essential technique of drama and poetry. Theories of *vyañjanā* and *alaṁkāra* were natural corollaries.

The world-view, the structural framework and the particular genius of the language were among the factors that gave rise to an elaborate system of formal technique relating to diverse but interconnected artistic expressions. In the context of theatre, it revolved around the key principles of *Mārgī* (literally, belonging to the path) and *Deśī* (local or regional); the *Nāṭyadharmī* (the way of the stage) and Lokadharmī (the way of the people); the four types of *abhinaya* (enactment or vehicles of expression), namely *vācika* (through the word and sound), *āṅgika* (through the body and gestures), *āhārya* (décor, costuming, make-up) and *sāttvika* (involuntary or that which belongs to the temperamental states). Parallel were the concepts of the *vṛttis* (styles), *bhārati* (verbal), *kaiśeki* (graceful), *arabhaṭi* (grand-melodramatic) and *sāttvati* (introspective), which had close correspondence with the four types of *abhinaya;* and the *pravṛttis* (the regional variations), namely, Ardhamāgadhī (eastern), Pāñcālī (northern), Avantī (western), Dākṣiṇātya (southern). Finally, there were the conventions of the zonal division of the stage, known as the *kakṣavibhāga*.

The creators of Sanskrit drama assiduously adhered to these principles until the 8th or 9th centuries, achieving each time a harmonious balance of the different elements. Diverse media and multiple styles were dexterously blended to create a whole where the

impersonal content of the different *rasas* or *sthāyi bhāvas* could be successfully communicated. There was, naturally, a difference in emphasis, degree and achievement, sometimes determined by the content and at other times by the genius of the individual authors. *Abhijñānaśakuntalam* of Kālidāsa and Viśākhadatta's *Mudrārākṣasam* are outstanding examples of the range of the dramatic content and form. The treatment of the same theme in *Cārudattam* by Bhāsa and *Mṛcchakaṭikam* by Śūdraka illustrate the differing capacities of two writers. Many other examples could be added.

The successors of Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti and Harṣa followed the pattern but a distinct change was already in evidence. Sometimes only the lyrical, even musical, elements were given prominence; at other times, as in the case of *Mālatī-Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti, melodramatic elements were focussed. Also, the growth of the pure prose tradition (cf., *Daśakmāracaritam, Kirātārjunīyam, Kādambarī*) in literature needs to be mentioned. The Purāṇas had great antiquity, but by and large between the 8th and 11th centuries many more of them were written, not the most significant being the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In short, the compositional format of kāvya, nāṭaka, itihāsa, ākhyāna and purāṇa were the mainstreams of the expansive river of creative writing. This, however, is not to discount the important activity in the field of didactic, moral and legal writing.

Between the 10th and 12th centuries two outstanding works, among some others, left a deep impact on all subsequent writing and conditioned artistic expression, both visual and aural or verbal. These were the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10th century) and Jayadeva's *Gīta-Govinda* (12th century). In different ways, and on different levels, the two works pioneered movements in India which were to hold the imagination of the creative artist for nearly eight centuries or more. Other historical, political and sociological factors contributed to the pervasive sway and renaissance of these two works through successive periods and in diverse regions of India.

It is against this background of the widespread use of Sanskrit language and literature which continued almost everywhere in India until the 15th-16th centuries and, in one or two regions, even until the 17th-18th centuries that one must understand the evolution of the major modern Indian languages. Between the 11th and 15th centuries, languages like Oriya, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, etc. were struggling for their respective identities. Some languages like Tamil and Malayalam had an older tradition; in the latter case, an amalgam resulting in the Maṇipravāla had taken place and which continued until the 12th century. The controversy between the Devabhāṣā (or Sanskrit) and Deśībhāṣas (regional languages) was not unknown and sometimes frequent in spite of the overall impression of their co-existence in most parts of India. If some were the protagonists of Sanskrit or *Mārgī,* others stressed the importance of the *Deśī,* but in fact the two lived together.

Later, Sanskrit drama had also given rise to a form of composition (which was known earlier but perhaps was not popular) called the Uparūpakas or the Ullapayas. Also, emerged the sattaka, a musical form used by Rājaśekhara in his *Karpūramañjarī.* Kṛṣṇa Miśra's *Prabhodhacandrodaya,* a didactic play, is found in several parts of India in different recensions. Some of these are in a *Saṅgītanāṭaka* form. Although the *Nāṭyaśāstra*

is silent on the issue of the Saṅgītakas, the *CaturbhāṇI* and Bāṇa's *Harṣa-carita* discuss a form of theatre known as the Sangitaka. The form is mentioned in a work of the 11th century entitled *Vaijayanti* by Yādava Prakāśa, and is discussed by Śubhankara in the *Saṅgīta Dāmodara.* The latter analyzes the different components of the genre. Names of other writers could be added.

Kulaśekhara's achievements and his unique contribution in evolving the Kuṭiyaṭṭam in the 11th century must be assessed keeping in view all these developments. He was not following to toto (as has been suggested by some writers) the earlier *nāṭaka* tradition. On the contrary, while following certain general principles, he was also introducing many innovations. For these innovations too, he had Sanskrit models and the seeds of many of his experiments lay in the works of his predecessors, both Sanskrit and Malayalam. He exploited fully the convention of the use of Prakrit by certain characters and thereby gave the role of *Vidūṣaka* a totally new dimension. The Sanskrit words could be turned, twisted, interpreted and deliberately misinterpreted in Malayalam by the *Vidūṣaka* with amazing effect. The convention continues in contemporary performance.

Almost contemporary were similar developments in Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka. Inscriptional evidence tells us of the drama called *Rājārājaśekharanāṭakam* written in the reign of Rājārāja Cola. Maṇipravāla was the language which evolved as a result of the interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil. We have drawn attention to the growth of Tamil literature during the period and the unique contribution of Kamban and writers of the Saṅgam period. In Andhra, an analogous phenomenon was in evidence and Nannaya, the "Ādikavi" in Telugu, could not have written his version of the *Mahābhārata* without an acquaintance with Sanskrit. Approximately, this was the time which saw the first beginnings of what could be recognized much later as the Yakṣagāna. In Karnataka, although the situation was somewhat different on account of a strong Jaina tradition, the writing of Pampā exhibits the same tendencies as in other parts of South India, which related to the evolution of a new language influenced by Sanskrit but sustained and fostered by indigenous traditions. Around this time, about A.D. 1090, when a Karnataka dynasty was established in Bihar by a Nanyadeva, he perhaps took with him the dramatic traditions of South India. To the 10th-11th centuries also belong the important commentaries on the *Śilāppadikaram* where many forms of dance, dance-drama and theatre are discussed at length.

While the Southern developments during this period were important for the whole of India, there appeared on the scene a writer from the East, Jayadeva, whose work was to have an extensive influence through the length and breadth of the country for many centuries.

His *Gīta-Govinda,* written in a simple Sanskrit that was often considered close to Apabhraṁśa gave a new impetus and direction to literary and dramatic activity. Its impact may not have been quite as great if the ground for a new type of drama had not been prepared by all these happenings in other parts of India. As we have said before, *Gīta-Govinda,* along with *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* captured the imagination of artists in all media, all through the medieval period.

Though within seventy years of its creation *Gīta-Govinda,* travelled as far as Gujarat; Orissa and Bengal, undoubtedly, were the first to come under its literary grip. Mithila in Bihar followed suit and by the 15th century it had travelled to North India (Rajasthan) and by the 16th to Maharashtra and other regions. The story of its spread and its varied flowerings, is a history apart, but here it is sufficient to point out that the work has played a unique role in shaping most, although not all, theatrical traditions of the medieval period. It was the most powerful work of the period, contributing perhaps to an unprecedented revival of interest in the Kṛṣṇa theme, to be followed by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the 15th-16th centuries and several translations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the 16th-17th centuries.

To the 14th and 15th centuries belong the important works of Vidyāpati (who wrote the *Gorakṣa-Vijaya Nāṭakam* after the model of *Gīta-Govinda*), Umāpati, and Jyotirīśvara Ṭhākura who wrote the *Pārijāta Haraṇa Nāṭaka.*

Concurrent was the emergence of several Indian languages like Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, etc. Elsewhere we have briefly related their evolution through several stages of Apabhraṁśa, Śauraseni Prākṛata, etc. Each of these languages showed the same tendency of drawing upon Sanskrit and local sources. Some of the outstanding works in each have also been referred to, particularly those like the *rāsakas* of the Jaina traditions in Gujarat.

By the late 15th and early 16th centuries there was a new efflorescence. Caṇḍidāsa and a little later Caitanya were its gigantic figures. The latter moved from place to place and, along with his followers, came to represent a cohesive cultural force irrespective of political developments throughout Eastern and some parts of Northern India.

In Assam, Śaṅkaradeva was the heralder of such a new awareness. All of them sang and danced, as it were, their reform movements and created an atmosphere of love and devotion, breaking barriers of class and social hierarchy. This was particularly so during a congregational theatrical experience. Mathura and Vrundavan were the meeting places, to which Caitanya and Śaṅkaradeva travelled and where Haridāsa, Vallabhācārya and his disciples flourished. Their output of *kirtanas*, līlās and the like was immense and its influence was near pervasive all over the country. The local *kathā*, the folk traditions of singing and the models provided by Jayadeva were all incorporated into new forms of theatrical performance; Yātrā, Aṅkiā-nāṭa or Bhāonā, and the Rāsalīlā forms, all owe their origins in varying degrees to these saint-poet-singers who were both creative artists and reformers. Śaṅkaradeva was the founder of the Aṅkiā-nāṭa or Bhāonā and his chiseling of the form influenced similar developments in Bihar and U.P.

The use of Brajabauli provided another vehicle of intra-regional communication. Caitanya's playing the role of Rukiminī himself led to new theatrical initiatives and a little later, the writings and enactments of *Hita Harivaṁśa* in Vrundavan laid the foundation of the Rāsalīlā. The poets of the Aṣṭachāpa school, the followers of Vallabhācārya (who had come from the South), strengthened and fostered the tradition. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa of Andhra wrote the *Vrajotsava Candrikā,* a kind of cycle play which may have been the earliest example of a full-fledged *līlā nāṭaka*. Jayadeva's *Gīta-*

Govinda was important, but equally significant was the renewed and intense interest in the Kṛṣṇa theme of the *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.*

The 16th and 17th centuries also significantly contributed to a fresh interest in the Rāma story. Although the *Bhaṭṭi Kāvya,* the *Mahānāṭaka* and the *Hanumannāṭaka* had been written between the 8th and 11th centuries, an Kamban and Pampā had earlier immortalized the theme in Tamil and Kannada respectively. Kerala and Andhra had also known their versions of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* in the 14th century. Most versions of the story at their best in the languages of eastern and northern India made their appearance only between the 16th and 18th centuries. Śridhara's Marathi *Rāmāyaṇa,* the Oriya *Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa,* Kṛttivāsa's Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* and above all Tulasidāsa's Hindi *Rāmacaritamānasa* belong to this period. One can go on adding to the list of such works in these regions.

Theatrical forms like the Jhānkī, literary compositions such as the Prabandhas, the metrical patterns of *campu,* dohā, caupāi, and the prose of the *vacana* of *vacanikā*, all influenced the formal aspect of literary creation, providing at the same time material for the several versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Rāmalīlā.

The origins of contemporary traditions of Rāmalīlā and several other ballad and puppet forms can be traced to this period and these versions.

The *Mahābhārata* and several Purāṇic stories, particularly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* also had an equally powerful hold. The Yakṣagāna of the 16th century, the Bhāgavatamelā of Andhra and Tamil Nadu, and the Kathākali of a slightly later period leaned heavily upon these for their heroic themes.

By the 18th century, while all these forms survived, there was or seems to have been a hiatus between the written word and the performance. Social and political changes were rapid and it is to this period that we owe the beginnings of the so-called 'secular' or more mundane forms such as the Nautankī, Khyāla, Bhavāi and Tamāśā. Bhavāi came the earliest and continued to keep its ritualistic links wholly or in part depending on the performers and the venue of the performance, while the others acquired a markedly socio-historical content and a popular theatrical mode devoid of mythology and ritual.

And finally in the 19th century there was the rise of the British power and with it the emergence in metropolitan centres of what has been termed the modern India theatre based mainly on Elizabethan, Victorian or Edwardian models. The educated Indian had turned away from his own moorings and the forms we have discussed here were relegated to sections of traditional society, rural or tribal, and to the socio economically deprived classes.

In the 20th century European ideas, both thematic and formal, influenced some of the literary genres, specially the novel and the theatre. These included the 'stream of consciousness' technique in the novel, developments in poetry leading to schools like those of the Imagists and Symbolists, and a new theatrical form drawing inspiration from Eastern models such as the Japanese Noh and Kabuki and the Chinese Opera. These trends and particularly the works of European playwrights like Brecht, Ionesco and a few others have left a deep impact on Indians. Ironically, however, this very impact was in

no small measure responsible for a homeward journey for these Indians, who began to search for their roots and draw inspiration from sources which have been instrumental in the birth of the European "epic theatre" in the 20th century.

Time, thus, is coming full circle through a rediscovery by modern Indians of their own ancient forms. Today in India these very forms are influencing modern *avantgarde* theatre for the last three or four decades in a most powerful manner. The forms, till recently relegated to the lowest socio-economic groups, have now acquired a new mobility and are subjects of elitist attention. Mobile theatre, indeed, would be an appropriate appellation for this theatre.

However, the Chau forms, constituting a class part, have remained the exclusive preserve of a particular class of performers. But they too have contributed to modern choreography.

Investigations into the social status of each of these groups, professionals and others, have revealed that while some forms are restricted more or less to Brahmins, others like the Aṅkiā-nāṭa or Bhāonā are performed by the Kṣatriyas, and yet a few others are still the special preserve of excommunicated groups like the Bhavāyās. Tribals like the Maṅgs and Kolhatis are the artists of Tamāśā, while the Purulia Chau is performed by the Bhūmija, Murās and Ḍoms. The democratizing role of theatre is obvious particularly in details of the performance and audience where the prince and the pauper rub shoulders with each other. The theatre in India is indeed a fifth Veda with no class or caste barriers.

Finally, we come to the broad framework of conventions of the stage. We have observed that practically in each of these forms, there are essential preliminaries. They range from the elaborate preliminaries of the Chau forms which take many days to perform, to the simple Gaṇeśa Vandanā of the Tamāśā. In Kuṭiyaṭṭam these are a class by themselves, while in the Karnataka Yakṣagāna they are important but not elaborate. In Bhāgavatamelā also, they are significant but not elaborate. In many, ranging from the Chau forms to the Aṅkiā-nāṭa and the Jātrās of Orissa, the erection of a pole equivalent to the *Jarjara* of the Sanskrit theatre is a must. This pole erection, however, has a history which antedates even the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Our first reference comes from the Vedas, particularly from the passages relating to the *yajña* of *Agnicayana* and the establishment of the *Yūpa*. They are followed by whole hymns devoted to the same subject in the *Atharvaveda*. The ritual has also to be connected with the agricultural rites of Jhum cultivation. An overlayering on the agricultural function relating to the erection of the pole is first given a magical significance; later, the pole is worshipped as an icon. In the context of Chau we have seen how the pole also represents Śiva; in the case of Bhavāi it is not the pole but the earthen jar called *garabī* or the bamboo structure called *māṇḍavī* which represents Ambā Devī. The preliminaries are all aspects of the *pūrvaraṅga* rites of the Sanskrit stage.

The actors who appear on the stage are almost all transformed to represent another order of reality and they follow in the main all the characteristics of the Sanskrit tradition where human beings are archetypes and symbols. This can range from the transformations attempted in the Yakṣagāna to the iconical, deified form of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in the

Rāmalīlā and Rāsalīlā forms. Even the characters in a social drama are types and stock characters. None are subjected to 'internal conflict.' Hero, anti heroes, gods and demons are in abundance; their little human foibles and chinks in their armour of goodness can be exposed or commented upon by the director-manager of the performance, the singers, and most of all, by the *Vidūṣaka,* who has a variety of functions in the dramatic action and presentation of the play. He is the link between the past and the present, the purposive breaker of the conventions of unities of space and time. He continues to be *Vidūṣaka* in his Sanskrit name in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, but becomes the Kodaṅgi in Yakṣagāna, the couple Kāji-Pāji in Chau, the Raṅglo in Bhavāi; his counterparts are characters like Viveka of the Jātrā, Munshī of the Nautankī, Behuwa in Bhāonā and sometimes even the Udhava of the Rāsalīlā. The *Sūtradhāra* of the Sanskrit stage is seen in almost all forms: he is the Bhāgavatar of Yakṣagāna, the Bhāgavātālu of Bhāgavatamelā, the Vyāsa of Rāmalīlā, the Svāmī or Gosāin of Rāsalīlā, the Sūtrādhīkarī of Aṅkiā-nāṭa, the Phaḍkarī of Tamāśā. He indeed is the playwright, director and producer combined in one who declaims, narrates, recites, sings as the occasion demands. He introduces the characters, enters into a conversation with them and at the same time is an objective spectator apart.

The plays are held in a variety of venues, some within the precincts of a temple courtyard as the Kuṭiyaṭṭam or Nāmaghara of the Sattras of Assam; others in the open on raised platforms as the Yakṣagāna, Jātrā and Rāsalīlā, or on level ground as the Chaus. They can also be performed in a changing locale, as is the case with the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi. However, in each case (except the last one relating to the Rāmalīlā of Varanasi) the audience is seated on three sides, and the normal acting area is a square, following a standard ground plan and motif of Indian architecture. Conventions of 'zones' or of marking different areas for different situations, and of freezing certain groups of actors, are common to these forms as also those pertaining to the Sanskrit theatre.

The play invariably begins with the sound of the drums, a preface which announces the performance far and wide. The main characters enter often behind a curtain held by two stage hands. The convention is common is Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Aṅkiā-nāṭa, Yakṣagāna, Rāsalīlā and Terukooṭhu, but is unknown in Bhavāi, Tamāśā and Rāmalīlā. The screen can be painted, coloured or white, but in each case it serves the purpose of creating a suspense before the actor-character is fully revealed to the audience.

The play is an amalgam of acting techniques. All four types of *abhinaya* mentioned by Bharata are utilized. The prose passages (or the *Vacana* type in South India) alternate with recited verses by the actors of *Sūtradhāra* and sung lyrics of the actors or musicians or both. The *campu, dohā, chaupāi* are among the several metres used in the South and North. This is almost a universal structural features in some forms the verbal content (*vācika*) is minimal as in the Chau forms, in the others it constitutes the mainstay as in the Rāmalīlā. The synchronization of the word and the sound, of the word-sound to the gestures is again a carry-forward of the Sanskrit theatre where movement and gesture were integral to the dramatic action, but the range and degree of co-ordination and movement skill are far apart. It is highly developed and chiseled to perfection in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, more general in Yakṣagāna and Rāsalīlā, but is minimal in Rāmalīlā and

Tamāśā. Nevertheless, movement and dance (*āngikābhinaya*) enter into the body of the theatre in many significant ways. There are entry stances of the *dharaṇas* of the Chau forms and the stylized gaits of Yakṣagāna, Terukooṭhu, etc.; there are the conventions of standing, sitting, sleeping, etc.; and finally, there is dance proper in the sequences which are the special domain of female actors (as in Tamāśā) or of those who play female roles (as in Bhavāi, Aṅkiā-nāṭa etc.). Dance is also important in the *rāsa* portions of Rāsalīlā and the *garabā* portions of Bhavāi.

Décor is non-existent for the most part except in a form like Aṅkiā-nāṭa or Bhāonā where large props can be brought in. In most forms, in the matter of décor all the conventions of the Nāṭyadharmī (the way of the stage) as mentioned by Bharata are followed. A bench, a chair, a stool can be suggestively placed to indicate a throne, a bed or anything. Costuming is of a vast variety, highly stylized as in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna or Rāsalīlā, thus eternal and timeless; or period costume, even if often anachronistic or incongruous, as in Yātrā and Nautankī or purely naturalistic costume as in Bhavāi, Tamāśā. The most interesting aspect is that of masks and make-up techniques: there can be grand masks as in Kṛṣṇāṭṭam (an important form which we have been obliged to exclude from this study), or masks like those of Narasiṁha in Bhāgavatamelā, or masks used in the Purulia and Seraikala Chau. A make-up can be highly elaborate, full of colour symbolism and ritualistic significances as in Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Yakṣagāna; it can also be realistic, grotesque and naturalistic, as for some of the characters of Jātrā or for the Jūṭhaṇ Miān of Bhavāi. A comparative study of the masks and make-up techniques will throw interesting light on the interconnection of these forms and some others known to many parts of Asia.

In each of our chapters we have referred to the important role of the musical instruments, particularly the drum. We have also drawn attention to the universal use of the *raga* and *tāla* system and the folk melodies in these forms.

All this and more constitute a distinct type of Indian theatre which is multifaceted and variegated. But, however unmistakably regional or local its separate constituents may be, they belong to a whole which is equally unmistakably Indian in form and substance. Also, it is as close to the high Sanskrit theatre as it is to the everyday lives of the people here and now.

The Indianness itself, of course, is not a static quality for it too is and has always been a flavour, a taste, a multi-dimensional living experience. The theatrical spectacle provides an opportunity for this psychical experience which has continuities with the past and with other regions of India, and a concern for the present as well as the here and now of the region or locality in question.

The theatrical experience has also an important sociological role to play for it is a strategy for 'livability', since during a performance lasting hours, days or sometimes even months, hierarchies are forgotten and the society as a whole asserts its unity and cohesiveness. In this respect the congregational theatre of this type plays an important cathartic role where social inequalities of the audience are ignored. It is not participative in the sense that dance and the tribal and folk music are, but nor is there a cleavage

between the actor of the proscenium stage and the audience who sits apart. Here the audience is a direct participant in the dramatic action. The actor, transformed or deified, is a timeless symbol, but with contemporary validity and meaning. Several strategies to communicate this dual plane are worked out in the technique of the spectacle. All in all, this theatre is like a many-limbed or many-faced God and acquires new meaning and significance with every experiment.

It is simultaneously eternal and temporal, concrete and abstract, set within the periphery of a circumference and has the potential of crossing boundaries. This paradox is the secret of its survival and its tenacity to nurture individuality within a collectivity. Its *Mārgī* and *Deśī* or its Nāṭyadharmī and Lokadharmī aspects are but two sides of the same coin or two concentric circles with the same center. The axis of the circle has a regional identity and the centre an Indianness which holds the totality together.

Truly did Bharata say in the beginning of his work; "There is no wise maxim, no learning, no part or craft, no device, no action, that is not found in *nāṭya;* that ultimately it will be conducive to duty, to *dharma.*" Each of the genres we have seen are true participants in a large *yajña* of a theatre where the actor and the audience follow their *svadharma.*

AFTERWORD

It is nearly three decades ago that this book was written. To revise the book to reflect the present day developments, transformations in the several genres of Traditional Indian Theatre would demand re-writing and not revising the book.

Understandably, during the three decades, not only the impact of this theatre, almost its inter-penetration into contemporary theatres, urban and modern, is visibly identifiable, but there is also the natural phenomenon of changes and modifications in the genres themselves. The socio-cultural space with the concomitant economic imperatives is different, and even in flux. Thus, there is interaction between the levels of society within a region, also across cultural and linguistic zones. In comparison, thirty years ago both the levels of society as also the genres were discreet categories, not in isolation, but certainly with a marked distinctive identity in the matter of social context, content as also 'forms' and techniques. Today, recognition of the forms has given them greater exposure to wider audiences, and the performers and the theatrical modes have absorbed influences, both from within the region as also contemporary experiments. Additionally, exposure to the media has had its impact, alas, some positive, some negative. The situation varies from region to region and form to form.

The book had endeavoured to identify levels of societal structure, the development of literatures in their dimension of a continuity with Sanskrit literature, on the one hand, and the evolution of regional literatures as departures from the Sanskrit tradition, on the other. While the account of the historical socio-political and literary developments will perhaps continue to have validity, the narration has necessarily to be placed within the temporal frame of its writing. It has to be clearly placed as the phenomenon of the late sixties and seventies, and not the twenty-first century. It was neither possible, nor perhaps advisable, to trace the developments and changes which have taken place during the thirty years. This would be another book.

Also, this was not considered necessary because in the intervening period some (although not sufficiently in depth) studies and monographs have appeared. This is particularly so in the case of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, Yakṣagāna, Seraikala, Chau and Rāmalīlā and Tamāśā. The recent literature on Bhavāi Jatra in comparison is meagre. An assessment or critique of the impact of the traditional theatre on contemporary theatre was clearly beyond the scope of the book and no afterwords could do justice to this fascinating engagement of modernity with the tradition.

Contemporary Indian theatre, sometimes called 'modern', is the unique expression of

the encounter of a post-colonial sensibility with traditional theatre forms, on the one hand, and developments of European theatre, on the other. To trace the history of the exposure of the West to another world of Eastern or Asian theatrical world, and its sequential impact on Indian theatre, by igniting a curiosity to delve into the living traditions of India, is a complex history of ideas, thought and theatrical structures. It calls for a careful investigation into the socio-political and intellectual discourse between 'cultures' and how this motivates the reshaping and reconstruction of the original. If Brecht encountered the East, he also reshaped the West. If Brecht influenced the East, particularly India, he was also obliquely responsible for the exploration and utilization of many traditional forms in contemporary theatres. While there has been a serious 'Afterword' has been written for the present edition of 2005 investigation of these multiple encounters in the visual arts, there is scope for detailed studies and critique in the field of the theatre. The book does not seek to do so.

It had then confined itself to what could be termed as traditional Indian theatre, the adjective 'traditional' not as static category, but one in constant flux and change without a violent rupture with continuity. Neither Kuṭiyaṭṭam, nor Yakṣagāna, nor Bhāgavatamelā or Rāmalīlā or Krişnaṭṭam have ever been frozen theatre in a fixed time frame, i.e., they are not 'period plays'. Their capacity to move and contain different orders of space and time have given them a resilience for survival.

For example, Kutiyattam is no longer confined to the precincts of the temple or the Kuttambalam. Also, no longer are the performers belonging to the Chakyar community. Indeed, there is only one family, i.e., of Ammannur Chakyar. Indeed, he himself is training students and disciples belonging to other castes and communities. The Natanakairali has enrolled both boys and girls from families other than those of the Chakyars. This may appear to be inconsequential in an urban milieu of contemporary theatre, but is of great socio-cultural significance when placed in the history of the Kutiyattam of a nearly thousand years. Margi, the other important institution, has sustained another stream of Kuṭiyaṭṭam, but again not through the family hereditary system.

The recognition of Kuṭiyaṭṭam as one of the first amongst the world intangible heritage list has given or will give it a further boost. During the three decades the form has been presented in milieus other than Kerala, the metropolitan cities of India, as also world forums. The questions to be asked are whether this widening of space and broadening of the social class or caste have brought about fundamental changes in the theatrical form. The answer would be on the whole in the 'negative'. It is interesting and educative to note that while it left the temple courtyard and the Kuttambalam, the limited theatrical space it utilized has remained unchanged, be it the proscenium stage or the outdoor performances. It is obvious that the minute movements and the seemingly slow pace of progression of the text required a highly demarcated physical space. Any attempt to cover large floor areas would negate the very fundamentals of the genre. It was the actor's ability to conjure up the illusion of moving in different orders of space, even terrestrial and celestial which gave the genre its very special character.

Intervention and innovations would tantamount to changing the character of the theatrical genre. Although the styles of intonation and recitation of the 'text' (the verbal, i.e. *vachika*) have travelled out of Kuṭiyaṭṭam to affect contemporary theatre, e.g. the work of Kavalam Panikkar, Kuṭiyaṭṭam has not made any departures from the principles of limited demarcated theatrical space. This, it may be stated, is no mean achievement, because the attraction of covering large theatre spaces would be hard to resist in a milieu of large spectacles.

Kuṭiyaṭṭam has also adhered largely to the plays which were written for Kuṭiyaṭṭam. Unlike Kathakali, it has not attempted to experiment with Shakespeare's *King Lear* or *Macbeth* or Mary Magdalene. This may be considered 'conservatism', but is indeed not so, because the authenticity of genre can only be sustained by its continually re-interpreting the original literary texts. Of course, Kuṭiyaṭṭam has been singularly fortunate in having a body of textual material, i.e., the Attaprakram. However, the shift of venues and the nature of audiences have certainly necessitated shortening of the duration of the performances. No longer can full plays be presented lasting several days or many hours. Thus, only select sections of a play are presented. While this is inevitable, it does raise questions about the performer's ability to present full length plays. While all efforts to recognize and encourage the unique character of this genre are necessary, it remains to be seen what the future holds.

In contrast, Yakṣagāna has undergone many important changes, both in the matter of content as also presentation. Its original open air spaces first led to multiple stages and simultaneous performances being presented to large multitude of audiences. The themes also were not restricted to the epics, specially the Mahabharata. Yakṣagāna was also used as an instrument of voicing dissent. The patron is no longer only the landed gentry, there is wider community participation. Of course, like Kathakali, Yakṣagāna has been presented on large proscenium stages in the metropolitan towns of India as also cities abroad. This has resulted in some modification of entries and exits, as also use of specific areas of the stage. What holds the attention of the audience is the ability of the actor to improvise, to elaborate through both verbal and the kinetic particular phrases of the text. The half-curtain continues to be popular and is a *tour de force* of the performances. Elements of Yakṣagāna technique have been used by contemporary directors to great effect. B. V. Karanth's production techniques have drawn heavily from the Yakṣagāna while adding and elaborating the musical score. Others have also made use of the character of the Kodangi. Yakṣagāna has served as a rich storehouse of theatrical conventions which have permeated modern productions. The fascination of the original has nevertheless not been lost. The headgear, the make up and costuming, the declamation style infused with a spirit of freedom and explicit or implicit comment on contemporary issues, have facilitated the continuity of the inherent vitality of the genre.

Bhāgavatamelā presents a different scenario. Although it has not travelled

outside the environs of the temples of Melattur and Soolamangalam, and the occasion continues to be the annual grand performance on the occasion of the Narasimha Jayanti, many dramatic elements have entered the performance. There is some element of realism, as also an attempt at melodrama. However, the ritual status of the Narasimha mask and the special austerities required of the actor playing the role continue with great authenticity. Bhāgavatamelā has thus retained both the essence as also the ritual significance of the performances, despite the larger publicity given to the occasion of the Narasimha Jayanti. In our earlier narration attention had been drawn to the connection between Bhāgavatamelā and Kucipuḍi.

The intervening three decades have shown that a form which may have been an intrinsic dramatic form can break out and develop as an independent genre. Kucipuḍi today is not only recognized as an independent classical dance style but has also branched out into distinctive styles. While one stream continues to have its links with the dramatic form Bhāgavatamelā, one has given it the appellation of Perani *nritta* and a second Bhamakalapam and a third Vilasini *nritta*. There is justification for each of these streams, because the generic form called Kucipuḍi has important antecedents in the traditions of particular dancers attached to the temple as also the musical dramatic narrative of the Bhamakapalam as also the tradition related to the Saivite cult Perani. Bhāgavatamelā thus has both a closed environs of the Bhāgavatamelā in Melattur and Soolamangalam in Tamil Nadu, and also a source of far more extensive spread in different styles in Andhra and outside Andhra. The annual performance of Bhāgavatamelā in Melattur will certainly continue despite the changes in the patronage and enlarging of audiences. Kucipuḍi has and will travel outside social context, as also single gender performances to assert its singular identity as a solo performance.

The three Chau forms – Seraikala, Puruliā and Mayurbhanj – received attention and approbation in the late sixties and seventies. Their performances were also held outside their original milieu both in India and abroad, but there has been little development of forms within their context despite the Sangeet Natak Akademi's efforts to give special attention. While Puruliā Chau impressed the urban audiences for its extraordinary vigour and robustness, it has perhaps gained little by the exposure. The introduction of glaring light of the stage has taken away the magic of the performance and the make up. Seraikala Chau is more popular amongst students of dance in the urban milieu. Not only the masks attracted attention, but the rich kinetic vocabulary of the lower limbs, the contrary hip movements have been incorporated into the eclectic dance dramas of the urban dance-drama traditions.

The recent productions of the Bharatiya Kala Kendra are an outstanding example. The use of the Seraikala masks by solo dancers like Ann Marie Gaston for her choreography is another instance. Mayurbhanj as a dance-drama was also acclaimed as a very sophisticated form. Gurus were identified and performances were held in Mayurbhanj and elsewhere. While the training continues, Mayurbhanj Chau has not

received the attention of either the theatre directors or choreographers. The fact that some of the outstanding gurus of the time, such as Krishnachandra Naik, became gurus and choreographer/ collaborators in productions of the dance dramas of troupes like the Bharatiya Kala Kendra and the Ranga Sri, has made a deep impact on modern choreography. Whether serious students of either dance or theatre will be drawn to these genres is uncertain. The kinetic vocabulary has penetrated into modern choreography but the original vitality in the socio-cultural context may well be lost in the absence of committed community participation and local sustenance.

Seraikala is today known for its masks rather than the Vaisakha parva performances. Puruliā Chau has been used by the State publicity departments and Mayurbhanj has not produced a comparable younger generation of dancers. As has been observed earlier, the continuity of these genre is dependent on the local community participation and commitment. If a temple, e.g., Melattur, holds central attention, Bhāgavatamelā continues, if the patronage base enlarges, e.g., Yakṣagāna, there are changes within and without, but if the socio-economic situation changes, then the form continues as a vestige of the past. It is given sustenance by state or central patronage but with no assurance of its having the inner strength to develop or modify. The case histories of the three Chau forms have many educative lessons to give.

Ankiā-Nāṭa, Bhāonā, Sattriya embedded in the history of the Shankaradev's monumental genius and the institution of the Sattras in Assam offers a different type of model lesson in the exercise of rejuvenation, representation, revival and restructuring of a form. The Sattras continue to perpetuate the legacy of the performance of Bhaona, unequal in standard and popularity in the different Sattras. However, during the period both the original form as also the adaptations of the form have given it a fresh lease of life. This is recovery and continuity of a different order. Bhaona and the emergent Sattriya dance have become a symbol of regional and particularly Assamiya identity. A new generation of female dancers who have been trained in the dance techniques, have taken on the role of the Sutradharis. Some of these dancers had received training in forms like Bharatanātyam. That training, combined with their effort to evolve a distinctive Sattriya dance form, has had interesting consequences. Others had received training only from the traditional gurus and have been successful in evolving a technique which can be clearly distinguished from other dance styles. The fact that the Sangeet Natak Akademi has recognized the dance form Sattriya as classical has given it an added lustre and status. As for the dramatic performance Bhaona, its trajectory has been different. Contemporary theatre has used it as a base for modern theatre, but the performances of the plays of Shankaradeva are in comparison less popular.

What is the model lesson that can be drawn from this phenomenon of a revival or rejuvenation of a form? Although there are some parallels here with the re-establishment and reshaping of Bharatanātyaṁ in the thirties, this is not an identical phenomenon. The restitution and reformulation of Sattriya was impacted by a very different set of

socio-cultural, even political factors, than Bharatanātyam. It is also different from the contemporary history of the evolution, development and recognition of Odissi. If national identity and a search for pristine tradition was the inspiration of the first and the reconstruction of fragments to a new whole on the basis of visual-textual evidence and the continuity of the *gotipua* of the other, in the case of Sattriya it is directly linked with the impulse of affirming a definitive regional identity and a striving for recognition at national level. How far Bhaona as bhaona will sustain itself depends on the strength and significance of the institution of the Sattras in Assamiya society?

Sattriya, the youngest of the neo-classical forms, has a future in the new institutional framework like Bharatanātyam, Odissi and Kathak, i.e., gurus, individual performers and support and sponsorship for performance in urban milieus and dance festival circuits.

The Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmalīlā, specially the Rāmālīlā of Ramnagar, Varanasi, has continued as a changing locale theatre but it has almost undergone a sea change. The Maharaja of Banaras continues as the patron; the chief actors, the *svarups,* are drawn from a particular community, the annual time of the Dussehra is unchanged, and yet in spirit, tenor and impact, there is a difference, an experienceable but perhaps not easily measurable difference. The large and wide participation of the community is evident as spectators of a spectacular performance lasting many days, but perhaps the fervour and faith of the devout as participants in a perennial drama is missing, if not absent. Have the same energies been diverted to an assertion of 'rights' as members of a particular community politically? Further questions can be asked in regard to the socio-political movements in Uttar Pradesh which have impacted on the dramatic/theatrical form. Of course there is renewed interest in the Rāmāyaṇa, in the several Ramayanas, and a large and impressive body of critical literature has emerged. The scholars are both foreign and Indian. Seminars and conferences have been held in Europe, Canada, USA and elsewhere. The motivation and the results are to underscore the variety and multiplicity of the Rama theme in the textual and oral traditions of regional literatures in India and South-East Asia.

What is true of the critical discourse in theatre is also true of scholarship in regard to the visual representation of the Rāmāyaṇa or Rāmā theme in different sites in India and South-East Asia. But none of these studies have impacted on the performance of Rāmālīlā in Ramnagar. The inner dynamics of the performance has been influenced by the changes and transformation of the sensibility and social consciousness of the large masses of participants. The several other Ramalilas of varying quality as annual pageant theatre or local drama continue in their own pace both from vitality or lethargy depending on local socio-cultural political milieu. This is a fascinatingly puzzling phenomena of contemporary India which requires closer investigation by social scientists and contemporary historians who by and large, alas, do not consider local, regional theatre on a single theme important enough for an intellectual discourse on the interface of democracy and theatre of the community.

Kṛṣṇalīlā is a study in contrast. Devotees throng Mathura and Vrindavana as before throughout the annual calendar, specially at the time of Holi and Janmashtami. The temples of Mathura and Vrindavana and the community has sustained the performance of the Kṛṣṇalīlā. If the mandals have left Mathura and Vrindavana to perform in locales other than the original, nothing has changed. It is as if a piece of an old architectural member has been relocated and placed back in its original situ. This is totally different phenomenon than that of Rāmālīlā of Ramnagar or Yakṣagāna or Kuṭiyaṭṭam or Bhāgavatamelā of Melattur or Soolamangalam. At best Kṛṣṇalīlā has reincorporated what it gave to the form Kathak some of the intricate *toras* and *tukras* and mnemonic sequences in the *nritta* technique. Also, although there have been many modern choreographies on the Kṛṣṇa theme and Kṛṣṇalīlā, they have not incorporated the *rasa* and *lila* format of the Vrindavana Kṛṣṇalīlā. This is a case of conserving a tradition, as is where is, in changing socio-cultural milieus.

Yātrā represents the other polarity. The form has changed from within, and has been adopted by contemporary theatre directors in varying degrees. The yātrā of an earlier era has witnessed its transformation into a fiercely commercial theatre of popular culture, on the one hand, and its characters, specially the *vivek,* have been re-established as chorus or observer/commentator of modern theatre. The original impulse of yatra as social drama has perhaps been responsible for its rapid mobility and inter-penetration into contemporary theatre. Utpal Dutt's production, his employment of the formal elements, gave the form a new recognition. Of course, Utpal Dutt's sensibility was different, motivated with a political ideology and modern sensibility.

What is true of yātrā is also true to a large extent of Tamāśā. The Tamāśā and the Lavani have been impacted by the media, but the theatrical dances and techniques have been generously utilized by contemporary theatre directors. The related form of the Dashavatara has also been employed. The resounding success of *Ghasiram Kotwal* authored by Vijaya Tendulkar lay as much in its forceful social message as in the brilliant production of Jabbar Patel who delved generously but discreetly into the theatrical tradition of Maharashtra, ranging from Sangeet Natak to Tamasha Dashavatara and to an extent even Lavani. Other contemporary theatre directors have used the theatrical techniques with varying success. However, none of these attempts has rejuvenated or given fresh vigour to the forms in their socio-cultural milieu.

The answers to these questions are not easy. How does the 'source' in whatever form sustain or develop in a fast changing socio-cultural milieu? What happens if the 'context' remains static and bound in a socio-historical temporal frame, and is not infused with a creative genius from within? Socio-economic status of the performers are subject to the pulls and pressures of an ever-spreading mass media which uses the form for popular consumer culture of another motivation. What happens when the literati and the urban theatre appropriates elements of the theatre to make a new whole? The list of

the questions at the socio-economic and artistic levels can be enlarged. There has been fortunately a vigorous critical discourse on these issues but not sufficient to inject new meaningful life to these original forms.

Bhavāi was the pulsating breath of village theatre undoubtedly of the so-called outcastes who entered and influenced caste society in many meaningful ways. The Bhavāi theatre like Yātrā was also trans-local theatre – the performers were the mobiles. The late Jaishankar Sundari brought a new dignity and prestige to the form through his seminal pioneering production *Mane Gurjari*. Shanta Gandhi followed. The Indian National Theatre played a key role in fostering and promoting the performers and the performances. And yet Bhavāi appears to have been overshadowed by urban theatre of Gujarat.

And finally Svàṅga, Khyāla, Mach, Nāch and Nautankī. A very fine distinction has to be made in respect of the recent trajectories of these forms. While Khyāla continues to be performed in different parts of Rajasthan and institutions like the Bharatiya Loka Mandala promote it, there is little that has changed. The performances are well received by local audiences and special shows are arranged for tourists, but it is doubtful if any major modifications of either theme or style have been made. Of course, some modern theatre directors have made use of the theatrical conventions of the genre.

Nautankī too has remained comparatively less exposed to audiences outside its own social context. There is in the performances understandably an impact of the mass media. The mass media also presents the form in some of its programmes. But it would appear that the form has perhaps lost its original robustness and some popularity. Also, there is little visibility of an energetic younger generation. One can be mistaken, but not totally wrong.

The forms Mach, Nach and Chattisgarhi have altogether another type of trajectory. This has largely happened on account of the towering creative genius of Habib Tanvir. He incorporated the actors of the theatre, naturally rural, into his productions. While the sensibility was modern and contemporary, the theatre techniques, the verbal enunciation and the body language were authentic and characteristically Chattisgarhi. An eclectic new genre came into being. Whether consciously affected by the exposure to Brecht or not, Habib Tanvir's productions were clearly the creative and unique expression of the Indian sensibilities encounter with the West (or more particularly European Brechtian theatre) and the tradition with a social purpose and message. The new form was no longer amalgam, it had its own personality and has come to stay. The extraordinary justifiable popularity despite the initial controversies has overshadowed the original performances of these forms in their local and regional context. The rich storehouse of themes and narratives continues to provide material, and is also albeit unequally sustained, but there is a real prospect of the total internalization of the forms into what would be termed as contemporary theatre.

It was not possible to deal with the vibrant traditions of Manipuri theatre, as distinct from the innumerable traditions of the tribal dances, the Nata Sankirtan, Thang-ta and

much else. Manipuri theatre was in total contrast to either the tribal dance forms or the collective or solo forms of the Meitei culture. This was the high melodrama of war and blood, of verbal declamation and stylized costuming of another era. A faint link of this drama with Parsi theatre could be established. This drama continues despite the troubled political situation. What is of greater significance is the creative and non-conventional but aesthetically most satisfying attempts by directors like Rattan Tiyyam and Kanahiya Lal in evolving a new and modern genre of Manipuri theatre. Rattan Tiyyam has taken epic themes, be it from the rata (e.g. Chakrayuha) or modern plays, e.g. Ashoka Priyadanshi, but has treated these themes in style and presentation by drawing generously from the vast and varied traditions of Manipuri. Here Thang-ta (martial techniques), naga movements, specially of the Kabuis, the nata sankirtana and a host of others are dexterously woven to create a new genre of contemporary theatre. Music and movement is of the essence. They are also so knit together that no longer does it appear a patchwork of diverse traditional theatre and dance techniques. Naturally this drama has the unmistakable stamp of the director, but its eclectic character cannot be denied. Traditional dance and dance-drama forms have been the ocean from which sustenance has been drawn. Take away the strong or delicate intonation styles, the vigorous and swift movements of the Thang-ta, the controlled and synchronized movements of the sankirtana, juxtaposed with the langourous lyricism of the jagoi, then the dramatic spectacle could be hardly created. Is this then modern contemporary theatre, or traditional dances and dance-drama in a new meaningful configuration. Kanhiya Lal's style is different, and yet he too draws upon the traditional theatre, as also dance-drama forms.

Exciting and commendable as these developments are, they also raise the question of the future of the storehouse of the traditions from which contemporary theatre has drawn freely, sometimes with discretion and at other times not.

We had begun our journey in the book with Kuṭiyaṭṭam and have commented now on the new international recognition that has been accorded to it. In passing we have also referred to the employment of Kuṭiyaṭṭam intonation and speech delivery techniques by a creative genius Kavalam Panikkar. He too does not restrict himself to drawing upon Kuṭiyaṭṭam. He casts his net wide to incorporate the kinetic vocabulary of Kalari of Kerala as also other dance-drama and theatre forms ranging from Theriyaṭṭam, to Padyani, and occasionally some elements of Kathakali. Kuṭiyaṭṭam is source but the large variety of traditional classical or folk forms also provide rich forest from which a contemporary modern theatre director constructs his particular, very individual theatrical garden.

The critique and analysis of the developments has to necessarily take into account the rapid changes in the socio-cultural and economic spheres. Urbanization, mass media has had its effect on the traditional forms. Their very recognition and ultimate incorporation into the thriving contemporary urban theatre has also resulted in dissolving of some forms. It is the fashioned, re-shaped which gains recognition

and legitimacy. This can, as it has, in some cases not only left the original source weakened and in extreme cases even threatened to extinction. As mentioned before, to elaborate upon or analyze the complexity of the phenomenon of the last three decades, with its moments of exhilaration and sorrow, would be another book, not this one.

As a spectator-participator of these events, and as a firm believer in nurturing the forests and the variegated species of nature and culture of India, while the emergence of new species is welcome and natural, there should continue to be space, place, time and opportunity for allowing the growth of the natural, native and local, in short for nurturing the *svabhava* of the original. Difficult no doubt in this age but perhaps not impossible. India has lived concurrently at many levels of time and space — the theatrical world is the most concrete manifestation. The multiplicity and diversity of the genres and their continuation is a necessary pre-requisite for the evolution of modernity, an alternate modernity or plural modernities.

	Kerala	*Karnataka*	*Andhra*	*Tamil Nadu*	*Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Orissa*	*U.P., M.P., Rajasthan*	*Gujarat*	*Maharashtra*
Ballad forms						Ala-Udal Dholā-Māru Pābujiki Paḍ		
Recitations by Kathākār					Dāsakāthiā narration		Cāraṇa	Cāraṇa Harikathā
Congregation singing or Kirtan		Hari-kathā Kīrtanāi	Burrā kathā hari-kathā Kīrtanāi	Hari-kathā Kīrtanai Rādhā-Kalyāṇam	Bara-Gīta Kīrtana	Bhajan Kīrtana	Bhajan Kīrtana	Bhārgīta Kīrtana
Jhāṅkī					Jhāṅkī (Assam)	Jhāṅkī (U.P.)		
Procession theatre					Yātrā Jātrā			
Cycle-plays or the Līlā forms					Bhāonā Aṅkiā-nāṭa (Assam)	Rāmalīlā (MP, UP, Rajasthan) Rāsalīla		
Mask-forms & Mask like make-up	Kṛṣṇāṭṭam Teyyam	Yakṣagāna Bhūtam			Seraikalā Puruliā, Chau also in Bhāonā		Mask of Gaṇeśa	
Street theatre	Ottānthullāl		Veethi-Nāṭakam	Terukoothu		Maca nāc Nauṭaṅkī Khyāla	Bhavāi	Tamāśā
Temple court-yard theatre	Kṛṣṇāṭṭam Kuṭiyaṭṭam	Yakṣagāna	Bhāgavatamelā Bhāmakalāpam	Bhāgavata-melā			Bhavāi Gaabī	
Temple theatre	Mutiyeṭṭu etc.	Devadāsī	Devadāsī-aṭṭam	Devadāsī-aṭṭam	Deodhani Mahāri			
Puppet forms	Tholpavakṭṭu	Gombeyaṭṭa	Bommalaṭṭam		Rāvaṇa chāyā	Kaṭhaputli		Citra-kathi Pinguli puppets

APPENDIX II

	Kutiyattam	*Yakṣagāna*	*Bhāmakalāpaṁ*	*Bhāgavatamelā*	*Aṅkiā Nāṭa*	*Rāmalīlā*	*Rāsalīlā*
1. Probable date of origin or revival	10th, 11th Cen.	16th Cen.	16th Cen.	16th Cen.	15th Cen.	16th Cen.	16th Cen.
2. Use of Sanskrit	Yes	Only in invocation	In parts	In parts		In parts	In parts
3. Indian language used	Malayalam	Kannada	Telugu	Tamil Telugu	Brajabauli Asamiya	Hindi	Vrajboli
4. Venue of the performance	Near temple	Open air	Near temple and courtyard	Near temple	Sattras	Temple or open air	Temple or open air
5. Theatre construction: i) Closed auditorium ii) Raised platform iii) Enclosed area iv) Open area	Kuṭṭambalam	iii	ii	iii	iii	iii	iv
6. Preliminary ritual: i) Installation of pole ii) Establishment of Jarjara iii) Principal diety		Pole installed Yes Gaṇeśa	Gaṇeśa	Narasiṁha		Viṣṇu	Viṣṇu
7. Social status of performers: i) Brahmins ii) Kṣatriyas iii) Scheduled Caste iv) Tribes	Cākyāras	Bhāgavatas	Bhāgavatas	Bhāgavatas	Mixed	Brahmins	Brahmins
8. Nature of audience	Sophisticated	Rural	Rural	Rural and urban	Rural and urban	Rural and urban	Rural
9. Principal themes	Sanskrit Classical	Pauranic	Pauranic	Pauranic	Vaiṣṇava	Vaiṣṇava	Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇava

(Contd...)

APPENDIX II *(Contd...)*

	Seraikalā Cahu	*Mayurbhanj Chau*	*Puruliā Chau*	*Yātrā-Jātrā*	*Bhavāi*	*Svāṅga-Khyāla*	*Tamāśā*
1. Probable date of origin or revival	17th Cen.	18th Cen.	17th & 18th Cen.	16th Cen.	16th Cen.	17th Cen.	18th Cen.
2. Use of Sanskrit	No	No	No	No	Sometimes	No	No
3. Indian language used	Oriya	Oriya	Bengali	Bengali	Gujarati, Hindi	Hindi Rajasthani	Marathi
4. Venue of the performance	Open air	Open air	Open air	Open air	Temple and open air	Open air	Open air
5. Theatre construction: i) Closed auditorium ii) Raised platform iii) Enclosed area iv) Open area	iii	iv	iii	Sometimes ii, iii and iv	Sometimes ii, iii	ii	iii
6. Preliminary ritual: i) Installation of pole ii) Establishment of Jarjara iii) Principal diety	Śiva-Śakti	Śiva-Śakti	Gaṇeśa	Durgā	Ambikā	Gaṇeśa	Gaṇeśa
7. Social status of performers: i) Brahmins ii) Kṣatriyas iii) Scheduled Caste iv) Tribes	Kṣatriyas	Pāikas—Scheduled Caste	Bhumij (iv) Doms, Muras	Mixed	Ex-communicated Brahmins or Jāṭa	Mixed	Mixed
8. Nature of audience	Rural and urban	All classes but largely rural	Tribal	Rural and urban	Rural	Rural and urban	Rural and urban
9. Principal themes	Romantic Pauranic	Epic and Pauranic	Epic and Pauranic	Mixed Social	Pauranic Secular	Mixed	Mixed

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Note: Where language is not mentioned it is English.

Glossary

Abhaṅga	The stance weight unequally divided along the central vertical median
Abhinaya	Expression denoting all acting techniques
Aḍavu	Cadence of movement in Bharatanāṭyam
Adhikārī	The stage director or conductor of Bhāonā, Yātrā (see Sūtradhāra)
Adhiṣṭhāna	Portion of temple, architectural term
Ādi-tāla	Name of tāla of Karnataka music with a cycle of eight beats
Agni-gadā or gherā	Torches used for lighting in Bhāonā
Āhāryābhinaya	Costuming, stage décor, make-up, masks etc.
Akhārā	Gymnasium used for a variety of purposes, including acrobatics, dramatics, dance; also generic word used for company of performers
Akkiṭṭa	Term in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, in invocatory song
Akṣara	Literally a letter, a term used in many contexts as primary unit of word, tāla etc.
Alam Śloka	A verse recited and sung by the Nānyārs and Nāṅgyārs in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Alarcca	Vocal sounds like roaring etc. in Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali
Ālīḍha	One of the sthānas in Nāṭyaśāstra used to depict shooting
Allapallava	Name of hand-gesture
Ambalavāsī	Temple servants, a group of people who are normally performers of Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Ambarayanattil nāṭa	Choreographial pattern used to portray flying, etc.
Aṅghāra	A long cadence of movement made up of several units
Āngikābhinaya	Expression (acting) through the use of different parts of the body
Anukrama	An initial section of Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Araddhi	Rhythmic composition culminating in triplets
Ārādhanānṛtya	Dance performed at the time of worship of deity, prevalent in Andhra, Karnataka
Arannutali & Arangu Tali	Consecration of the stage by the Nambyār performed at the beginning of each act in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Arasā	A cadence of movement executed to the accompaniment of mnemonics (Odissi)
Arayum talayum murukki	A choreographical movement for preparation of action or combat in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Ardha ālīḍham	Position akin to Ālīḍha taken by ascetics as described in portions of 'Āścaryacudāmaṇi'
Ardhamaṇḍalī	A basic stance with out-turned knees bent to sides and heels together and toes facing opposite directions; akin to *demi plié* of Wester ballet,

and Vaiṣṇava and Vaiśakha Sthānas of the 'Nāṭyaśāstra.' A triangle, guiding motif, used in many Indian dance styles, particularly Bharatanāṭyam

Arūpa — Beyond form, or formless
Āśāna — Teacher, guru in Kathākali, etc.
Āsana — Sitting position
Āsara — Arena stage (Yātrā)
Aṣṭamaṅgala Vastu — The eight auspicious objects and ritualistically before a performance (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Aṣṭatāla — Name of tāla
Atikāya — Name of a character in Yakṣagāna; son of Rāvaṇa
Atikrānta — Name of a unit of movement suggesting elevation of one leg
Atunna Sūtradhāra — Elaborately dressed Sūtradhāra with glowing red-nose make-up
Āvaṇi or Āvaṇu — Name of musical melody used as entry songs in Bhavāi, sung generally at the time of the appearance of a character

Balipīṭha — The stone in front of a temple; originally sacrificial stone
Bāyana — Section of the orchestra which sits on the left in Bhāonā
Behulā nāca — Devotional dance connected with Manasā worship
Behuwa — The fool of Bhāonā
Bhāgavatara — Conductor of performance
Bhaint — Devotional song in Khyāla, Bhavāi, etc.
Bhakti — Devotion
Bhāṣā — Language, popularly used for local language
Bhātima — Type of musical composition used in Bhāonā
Bhāva — Emotion, mood, variety of meanings
Bhoriyā nāca — Type of dance
Bhrāntam — Expression of characters appearing demented in Kuṭiyaṭṭam, etc.
Bhuṅgaḷ — Copper wind instrument used in Bhavāi

Cācar — Round or square arena theatre for Bhavāi
Caḍacaḍi — Name of instrument
Cākyār Kuttu — Theatre form specific to Cākyārs
Cāli — Name of a set of primary movements denoting walking
Candrakalā — Half moon; forehead mark; name of hand gesture
Carcari — Name of musical and dance composition mentioned in Sanskrit literature
Cāri — A unit of movement depending upon foot contacts and leg elevations
Caubola — Four-line verse form
Cauka — Technical word for an open position stance with knees bent and feet apart, akin to the grand plié of Western ballet and maṇḍala sthāna of 'Nāṭyaśāstra.' Also term used for open square space inside a building
Caupāi — Name of metrical pattern in versification
Cautisā — Verse form
Cavittuka kriyā or Cavattu cavittuka kriyā — Technical term for phase of Kuṭiyaṭṭam dance behind curtain and without mime

Cavittu-Nāṭakam	A dance drama opera form popular amongst the Christians of Kerala
Cayilyam	A nose red powder mixed with oil used for make-up in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Cenḍā	Name of musical instrument, vertical drum played with sticks
Ceṅgalā	Name of musical instrument
Ceriyakkam	Choreographical passage used at the time of formal entrance
Chadma	Disguise
Channavuram	A carved chest ornament in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Chālikya	Name of composition mentioned in Sanskrit literature
Chāuni	Military camp, disguise, etc.
Chāyā	Shadow
Choughara	Greenroom or property room, literally disguise room (Bhāonā)
Coliyaṭṭam	Mime only with drum
Coliyaṭṭam	Phase in Kathākali and Kuṭiyaṭṭam where actor can improvise
Coliyunti nāṭa or Collunti naṭakkuka	Rhythmic pattern of seven beats used for walking from one place to other
Cūrṇika or Cūrnapada	Verse forms
CuṭṭI	A three dimensional white frame made of rice paste and paper
Cuvapputuni	Band of red cloth worn in first costume piece in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Dakṣiṇa Sāhi	Name of one group of players in Mayurbhanja Chau
Dānḍiyā rāsa	Kind of circular dance where dancers hold sticks
Dapha or Daf	Kind of drum in the Chau and other forms
Dāru	Popular or Prakrit Version of Sanskrit dhruva, denoting, preliminary songs before the main action of the play begins; used in context of Bhāgavatamelā
Daśāvatāra	Ten incarnations of Viṣṇu
Deśabhāṣa	Language of particular region, used for various Indian languages as distinct from Sanskrit
Deśī	Place, region, used also for 'popular' in its secondary meaning anything specific to a region
Devadāsiaṭṭam	Theatre (play) of Devadāsi, used for form of dance which was the immediate precursor of contemporary Bharatanāṭyam
Devgandhāri rāga	Name of rāgini
Devasthānam	The organisation authority for looking after temples; literally abode of Devas
Dhamali or Dhemali	Aspect of singing and drumming in the initial stages; melodic compositions used in the preliminaries of the Bhāonā
Dhamali	Name of songs sung to welcome a bride; several types prevalent in Assam
Dhīrodātta	Type of character (noble hero)
Ḍholak	Double barrel drum, common precussion instrument
Dhruvā	Songs used in the preliminary portions (see Dāru above) used in many forms
Dhumsā	Large kettle shaped frum used in Puruliā Chau played with mallets
Dohā	Particular type of poetic composition with a specific rhyme scheme
Dṛśya Kāvya	Play or theatre; literally, visual poem

Dubā	Name of movement in Chau; out of drowning used for a type of movement in Chau forms particularly Mayurbhanja Chau
Dvipadī	Type of metrical pattern in verse
Eḍakkā	Small drum with movable sides, played with sticks
Ekatālam	Rhythmic pattern with four beats
Ekkalagāna	Style of music, solo music
Gāca or Gācha	Plants, but used for trunsk of trees used as lighting poles or stands in Bhāonā
Gamaka	Embellishment in music
Gambhīra	Name of character, also class of people
Garabī	The ritual pitcher used in many theatre and dance forms of Gujarat
Gati	Gait
Gejje	Little spherical bells tied around ankles
Ghaṭa	Vessel, circular pitcher or pot used in ritual preceding the dramatic spectacle in many forms
Ghaṭavāli	Name of consecrated person who carries the ritual pitcher and falls into a trance
Gopa-pīṭha rāga	Musical composition
Gopi-cinha	Special forehead mark in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Gopi-prārthanā	Section in Vrajarāsa
Grāmadevatās	Deities of the village
Gurughaṭa	Sections of Bhāonā
Halgi	Drum with the side cover used in Tamāśā
Hallisaka	Circular dance mentioned in 'Harivaṁśa' and other Purāṇas
Hāsya Kriyā	Brief choreographical passage comprising jumping movements each side
Iḍakkā or Eḍḍakā	Name of instrument
Indola or Indala	Type of melody used in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Jājam	Floor spread
Jakkini	Name of character, demoness
Jalakrīḍā	Water-play
Jānūbhayam	Movements where irouettes are executed on knees
Jarjara	The pole used in the preliminaries of the play
Jhampa	Name of tāla
Jhānjha	Name of musical instrument
Jhulan-jātrā	Festival of the swing
Jhumara	Form of musical composition, also used for dance composition in Assam
Juḍi or Juri	Literally pair; a set of singers who sing on behalf of the actors in Yātrā
Kadali	Particular type of banana

Kaikottikali	Name of group dance of women
Kaiśiki Vṛtti	Soft lyrical style
Kākḍā	Lights
Kakṣavibhāga	Zonal division of the stage
Kalappurattu naṭakkuka	Movement used for exists and entrances, calm and dignified
Kali bhaṅga	Nature of movement denoting a fluid continuous movement
Kali kaṭā	Nature of movement deboting sharp these movement in Chau
Kaliyam veccu tiriyurka	An actual movement indicating the completion of initial preliminary movements
Kalyāṇī	Name of rāga
Kamala parivartanam	An actual movement of the hands used before anukrama
Kāmāstram	Arrows of Kāmadeva also used for interpolated passages in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Kampu	Collyrium for the eyes
Kāñcaḷiyā	Female character dancer in Bhavāi, who wears Kāñcaḷī
Kāpaḍ-cithaṇā	Term of using rags for making masks in Puruliā Chau
Karaṇa	Cadence of movement
Karatāla	Musical instrument
Karadhanī	Girdle
Kargam	Type of ritual dance and the ritual pitcher
Karmā	Festival coinciding with rainy season
Kartarmukha	Hand gesture, like the scissors or pincers
Kaṭakam	Bracelet carved of wood, also name of movement
KaṭI kacchini	Type of garment
Kaṭisūtra	Waist girdle, also used as technical term in sculpture
Kāvadi	Form of ritual dance
Kavi gāna	Form of composition
Kāvya	Poetry of long narrative in verse
Kedaga	A fan like ornament used as headdress (Yakṣagāna)
Kedāra	Name of rāga
Keli-gopāla	Name of work
Keṣābharam-Kirīṭam	Ornate crown with disc in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Kettittiriyal	Swift movement of hands where one hand moves and crosses the other wrist
Kīrtana Kīrtanāi	Forms of musical compositions
Kodangi or Koṇāngī	Fool in Bhāgavatamelā and Yakṣagāna
Kolam	Wind instrument
Komali	Fool in Terukoothu
Kompa	A kind of a trumpet (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Kora-kurunni	Melody in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Korvai-rāga	Name of rāga
Koti	Unbleached cloth as ceremonial gift
Kriyā	Ritual choreographical pattern (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Kucal	Wind instrument
Kulasaṅkha	Name of forehead mark in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Kummi	Circular collective dance of women

Kuṇḍala	Convex ear ornament
Kuppayam	Long sleeved red jacket
Kuri Kunam	Brief movement as part of nṛtya kriyā
Kurumkuzhal	Small wind instrument
Kuṭṭambalam, Kuṭṭampalam	Theatre halls in Kerala
Kuttu	Play, sport, etc.; generic word
Kutumma	Long hair brought in a knot on top cap of Vidūṣaka
Kuṭṭuvilakku	Wick lamp
Kuzhitalam or kuzhitāla	Small pair of cymbals
Lakuṭa	Form of circular dance
Lāsya	Category of dance with soft feminine movements
Lāvaṇī	Genre of musical composition also used for dance
Lokadharmī	Dramatic style closer to a naturalistic presentation; literally, the conduct (style) of the people
Maddāle	Name of barrel drum in Yakṣagāna
Mahata mata	Torches and lights fitted in poles or trunks of threes
Māhoori	Wind instrument
Mākhana-corī	Kṛṣṇa-episode relating to the stealing of butter
Manayola	Yellow mineral powdered as yellow used in Kuṭiyaṭṭam and Kathākali
Maṇḍapa	Hall
Maṅgalaśloka	Auspicious benedictory verse
Maṇikūta	Shrine in the nāmaghara (Bhāonā)
Manodharma	Section of Kathākali and Kuṭiyaṭṭam where the actor is free to improvise
Mārgī	Which belongs to the path, commonly equivalent to 'classical'
Marmālā	Open ended garland
Mata metukkal	Movement used in formal entrance
Mati ākharā	Technical term in Bhāonā for exercises of hands
Mattavarni	Section of stage, either plinth elevation or passage
Mattigadā	Torches used for lighting
Meyyu	A choreographical passage which begins with hopping movement; actor jumps forward in deep knee bends, covering four directions
Minukku or Minnukku	Naturalisitc make-up used for women, sages, etc.
Mirkha varnam	Actions expressive of the character usually performned after intervals
Mizhavu	Large pot-like drum covered with hide used in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Moramukuṭa	Headgear (peacock crown)
Mṛdaṅga	Cylindrical drum
Mudi	Knot or bundle of hair
Mudi kedaga	Fan-like ornament for hair-knot
Mukhambikā	Name of deity
Mukhajabhinaya	Expression through facial movements
Muktaya	Rhythmic composition with mnemonics
Mundāle and Mundāsu	Headgear in Yakṣagāna
Mutiyakkitta	Concluding ritual drumming; originally benediction verse, technical

	term for dance section (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Muzhuvan	Cloth equivalent to four bundles
Nāgamaṇḍala	Ritualistic floor design with the snake motif
Nakārā	Name of percussion instrument
Nāmaghara	Place for congregation in Sattras of Assam
Nagārā	Name of percussion instrument
Namaskāra Muṇḍapa	Architectural term for a hall in Kerala temples
Nambyāra	Name of community who are musicians in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Nāndī	Essential preliminary phase of the Sanskrit theatre
Nāṅgyār or Nanyār	Name of female character (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Naraghaṇ	Pair of vertical drums which the Bhavāi actor ties around his waist: one is called Naraghaṇ and the other Bāyān
Narasingha	Name of wind instrument
Nṛtya	Movements of the body performed to communicate a theme; dance with thematic content
Nṛtyaśālā	Dance or dance-drama hall, or enclosure
Nāṭakaśālā	Playhouse or theatre
Naṭṭakulam	Village assembly (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Naṭṭuvanāra	Chief musical accompanist or dance director
Natuwa nāc	Dance of boys in Bhāonā
Nāṭya	Drama with speech
Nāṭyabhangi	Pose related to dramatic action
Nāṭyadharmī	One of the modes of presentation, denoting stylization (lit., conduct of theatre)
Nāṭyamaṇḍapa	Dance or drama hall
Nāṭyaśāstra	Name of treatise written between 2nd Cent. B.C. and 2nd Cent. A.D.
Nāyaka	Hero
Nāyikā	Heroine
Nepathya	Greenroom
Netrābhinaya	Expression techniques through movements of the eyeballs, eyelids and eyebrows
Nibhatakin	Dramatic tableaux-like presentation in Burma
Nilāmbari	Name of person as also a play and name of rāga
Ninam	Substance used to present blood in Kathākali
Nirvāhana	A phase in Kuṭiyaṭṭam when the character narrates his past history or brings the story to date
Nitya kriyā	Ritual choreographical pattern
Nitya kriyā	That which is usually done or normal
Nityarāsa	Name of particular rāsa which can be performed at any time
Nonnanam or Nonganam	Type of grass used in Śurpaṇakhā's dress
Nṛtta maṇḍapa	Dance hall
Nṛtta	Abstract movements or pure dance
Occappetuttal	First passage of percussion, sounding the drum, (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)

Oddologa	Mnemonics used in Yakṣagāna when characters enter
Ojā-pali	Genre of music and dance
Oḍhanī	Upper garment; long scarf
Pacca	Green, used for basic make-up colour for good characters in Kathākali
Pāda	Feet used in many contexts in its secondary meanings
Pagaḍi	Headdress, a long piece of cloth tied around the head in different ways
Pallakam	A cloth of about two metres in length pleated lengthwise, hung from waist
Palaka	Low wooden stool approx. 6 cm. High, round or ovoid used in Kathākali
Pancapadam	Five steps also called pancapade vinyāsam (five steps)
Pancaniam	Head to foot description
Panḍāla	Temporary enclosure with canopy used for any congregation or theatre
Paravṛtti	Technical term denoting regional
Parikhanḍa or Pharikhanḍa	Shield and sword used for exercises in Chau
Parikramā	Circling, stepping from side to side
Parivarttan	A manner of walking indicating sorrow or weakness
Paudha	Acting aea in Bhavāi, see cācar
Pazhuppa or Pazhukka	Name of basic rose-red make-up with a golden shade used in Kuṭiyaṭṭam for Brahmā, Śiva, etc.
Phāgu	Particular form of literary composition prevalent in Gujarat, Rajasthan
Phugadi	A circular dance of Maharashtra
Piṇdibandha	Technical name for group dances with particular choreographical patterns
Pīṭham	Carved wooden stool, stage furniture
Prameyam	Brief narration of story in gestures of events preceding the scene
Prasāda	Consecrated flowers or food distribued after having been offered to the deity
Prasaṅga	Episodes (Yakṣagāna)
Prastāvanā	Introduction, preface; initial stage of the play
Pravacana	Final benediction or didactic monologue
Praveśikam	Entrance in Kuṭiyaṭṭam; series of movements indicating anger or rage
Praveśa-dāru	Songs used for entry of characters
Praveśa-gīta	Entrance songs
Pulayārkali	Form of ritual dances
Purappadu or Purappada or Purappatu	Phase in Kathākali and Kuṭiyaṭṭam dance prelude
Puruṣa	Men and Cosmic Man used in many contexts with multiple meanings
Puruṣārtha	Four goals of life, namely, Artha, Kāam, Dharma, Mokṣa
Pūrvaraṅga	The entire section of the theatrical presentation generally called preliminaries, divided into many phases
Puṣṭimārga	Doctrine of particular Vaiṣṇava groups
Rabha	Enclosure built for presenting play in Assam

Rājasevā	Loyalist behaviour, one of the aspects of ridiculing Puruṣārthas
Rāmatāla	Name of musical instrument
Raṇasiṅgha	Name of musical instrument
Rangabājā	Preliminary musical overture in Chau
Rangamanca	Stage
Rangapīṭha	Front stage
Rangaśīṣa	Back stage; interpretations of dimensions given in Bharata's 'Nāṭyaśāstra' vary
Rangasthala	Space of the theatre used also for acting area
Ranṭam nāta	Choreographical sequence of Nṛtya kriyā in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Rasa	Flavour, aesthetic experience etc.
Rāsa	Circular dance of Kṛṣṇa, first described in the 'Harivaṁśa Purāṇa'
Rāsadhārī	Group of people who direct and perform Vraja Rāsa
Rāsaka	Name of particular dance composition, also name of literary composition
Rāsamaṇḍala	Circle formed during the rāsa
Rāsaśiromaṇl or Rasikaśiromaṇl	Appellation used for Kṛṣṇa in Vraja Rāsa
Rūpaka	Name of literary composition, also name of tāla
Sādhanā	Discipline, practice
Sādirnṛtya	Form of dance, precursor of contemporary Bharatanāṭyam
Sāhitya	Literature, but often used in the sense of connoting verbal content in dance or drama
Sajāghar	Greenroom
Sakhī-bhāva	Attitude which considers all human beings as beloveds of Kṛṣṇa
Sampradāya	A group of people, sect
Saṁkṣepam	One of two long interpolated passages not recited but shown through gestures (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Sañcārī-bhāva	Transient emotions
Sandhi	Phase of the plot, and also joints
Saṅgīta	Name of particular genre of musical drama
Saṅgītaka	Name of particular genre of musical drama
Saptapadi	Metrical pattern with seven feet
Saru-bhangi	Phrase of dance
Sattra or Satra	Vaiṣṇava institutions of Assam
Sattaka	Name of particular type of play
Sāttvika	Type of enacting relating to involuntary states or internalised expression
Sawāla-jawāba	Question-answer type of dialogue
Siṁhāsana	Pedestal or raised platform used in Vraja Rāsa for Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā
Śloka	Form of Sanskrit verse
Smita-aṅga	Name of a type of movements which are relaxed and closer to the body, i.e. limbs ued for outward to inward movements
Śolukuṭṭa	Mnemonics used in Bhāgavatamelā, Bharatanāṭyam, etc.
Soṅgāḍyā	Clown in Tamāśā
Soraṭhā	Metre in poetry, also, name of rāga

Srīkaṅṭha	Name of melody in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Sṛṅgāra	Erotic, or relating to love
Śruti	Micro-note
Sthāna	Standing position
Sthāpanā	Establishing
Sthāyī-bhāva	Dominant mood
Sukumāra	Soft, delicate
Sūtrabhaṅgi	Phrase of dance
Sūtrabhaṅgi-parenga	Technical term of portions of Manipuri
Sūtradhāra	Stage director, conductor etc.
Svarthil or Svartil Colluka	Recitative techniques in Kuṭiyaṭṭam
Svarūpa	Technical name for actors who are supposed to be defied or consecreted for the performance
Śyāma	Blue, green or dark
Tālam-Tālakkuttam	Small brass hand cymbals
Tāṇḍava	Generic term for dance associated with vigorous strong movement
Tāṇpurā	Musical instrument
Tantṭi	High ranking priest
Ṭappā	Genre of vocal music
Tappiyiranni or Tappiyiranguka	Movement where the actor keeps one foot in a circular pattern (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Taṭṭi	An interploated verse recited by Nānyār
Tecci	Name of red orange flower
Teeyyam or Theyyam or Deviyyam	Form of ritual theatre
Terperumattattil nāṭa	Character riding a chariot (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Teyapani	Tamil verse form
Thodaya-maṇgalam	Preliminary dance sequence
Tilaka	Forehead mark
Tirmāṇam	Cadence of movement
Toḍī	Name of rāga
Tolvala	Bracelet in Kathākali, also called keyuram
Topkā	Cadence of movement in Chau
Toṭṭam	Form of literary composition or chants in Kerala
Tuntune	Single stringed instrument used in Tamāśā
Udātta	Ascending sound patterns
Ufli	Technical term for a category of movement in Chau
Upāṅga	Parts of the body such as face, neck, wrists, ankles, etc.
Urdhvalatā	Name of cadence of movement
Urdhvapundra	Type of forehead mark worn by several characters (Kuṭiyaṭṭam)
Uskā	Type of movement in Chau
Usṇiṣam	White cloth tied like a cylindrical turban

Uttarīyam	Scarf like upper cloth with decorated ends
Vācanā	Type of prose
Vācikābhinaya	Verbal expression
Vairāgī	Particular sect
Vaiṣṇava	Followers of Viṣṇu
Vaiṣṇavism	Pertaining to Viṣṇu
Vāk Word	
Vakrapādam	Sitting position with both knees bent and both legs resting on the floor
ValaSet of three bangles	
Vancanā	Deception, one of the aspects of ridiculing the Puruṣārthas
Vasikam	Tiara-like coronet carved of wood and guilded
Vala kali	Form of dance
Vidūśaka	Clown in Sanskrit and other theatre forms
Vikṛṣṭa	Type of playhouse
Vilakku, also kuttuvitakku	Oil-burning wick lamp
Viveka	Name of character in Bengali Yātrā
Vyabhicāribhāva	Transient or subsidiary moods, expression
Yātrā	Primary meaning journey, form of procession theatre
Yātrā-ghaṭa	Name of ritual pot or pitcher
Yanadi	Name of tribe

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मुद्रक : डी. आर. प्रिंटर्स एंड कन्वर्टर्स प्रा. लि., ए-31, सैक्टर-9, नोएडा

The book is a pioneering study of some forms of Indian performing arts which are neither "folk" nor "classical" in the conventional sense of the terms, but belong to a twilight region combining elements of both. Though often widely divergent in character and expression, they nevertheless present an organic cohesiveness and a world-view which, typically as well as traditionally, are Indian. It is this unity of experience which adds a special quality to the present work.

The contents include description and analysis of a variety of forms such as Yakṣagāna, Bhāgavatamelā, Chau, Nautankī, Rāmalīlā and many others, and cover the whole of India, from Kerala to Uttar Pradesh, from Gujarat to Assam. While presenting them in a desired perspective, the author has not only used evidence from archaeological, textual and oral sources; whatever she says is also the result of a knowledge and comprehension which can be expected only from an artist. An 'Afterword' by the author for the present edition has been added.

Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, a classical dancer in her own right, is also one of the eminent theoretical exponents of Indian dance forms. She has been engaged in a systematic study of the performing arts for twenty-five years and among her widely acclaimed publications are *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* and *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance.* She is a Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and a recipient of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fellowship.



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